



Harry Jeff Walker

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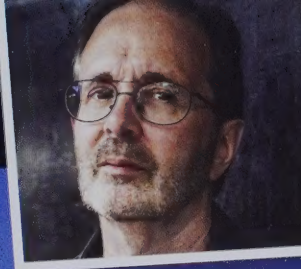


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Reviews
Ross Ainslie
"Splendid stuff!"

Ian A. Anderson
"I said I'd never go to a
folk club again."



penguin eggs

the final issue



elvis costello
the roots quartet

ML
5
P46
no.88/89
2020/2021

HSS

gilkyson
lébarras
ardanelles

dirk powell
maria dunn
rick fines

Album of the Year

Pharis and Jason Romero



Let On Love

Issue No. 88/89, winter/spring,
2020/2021, \$12.99



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04

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A new record of widely disparate styles reflects his ongoing desire to continually reinvent himself.

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His long experience in acoustic folk and blues makes it a ready pleasure to hear his new batch of songs.

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Artful synthesizers fuse with acoustic instruments on bold interpretations of traditional music from St. Kilda.

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She believes music can change the world and her new album, one of her best, may be her most political to date.

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She thrives on documenting the lives of "people who make a difference" in her outstanding new recording.

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He photographed iconic folk and rock musicians, including John Lennon for the cover of *Rolling Stone*.

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This trio's traditional songs and dance tunes are firmly rooted in the French-speaking culture of North America.

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Americana roots-rocker reinvents himself with a wonderful album of acoustic versions of his favourite songs.

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The band's exhilarating arrangements of Newfoundland's jigs, reels, and singles are sewn together into heirlooms.

54 Dirk Powell

With a deep love of Appalachian, Cajun, and Celtic music, his skill at blending those traditions harmoniously is unequalled.

Front Cover Design:

Michael "A Man Called" Wrycraft

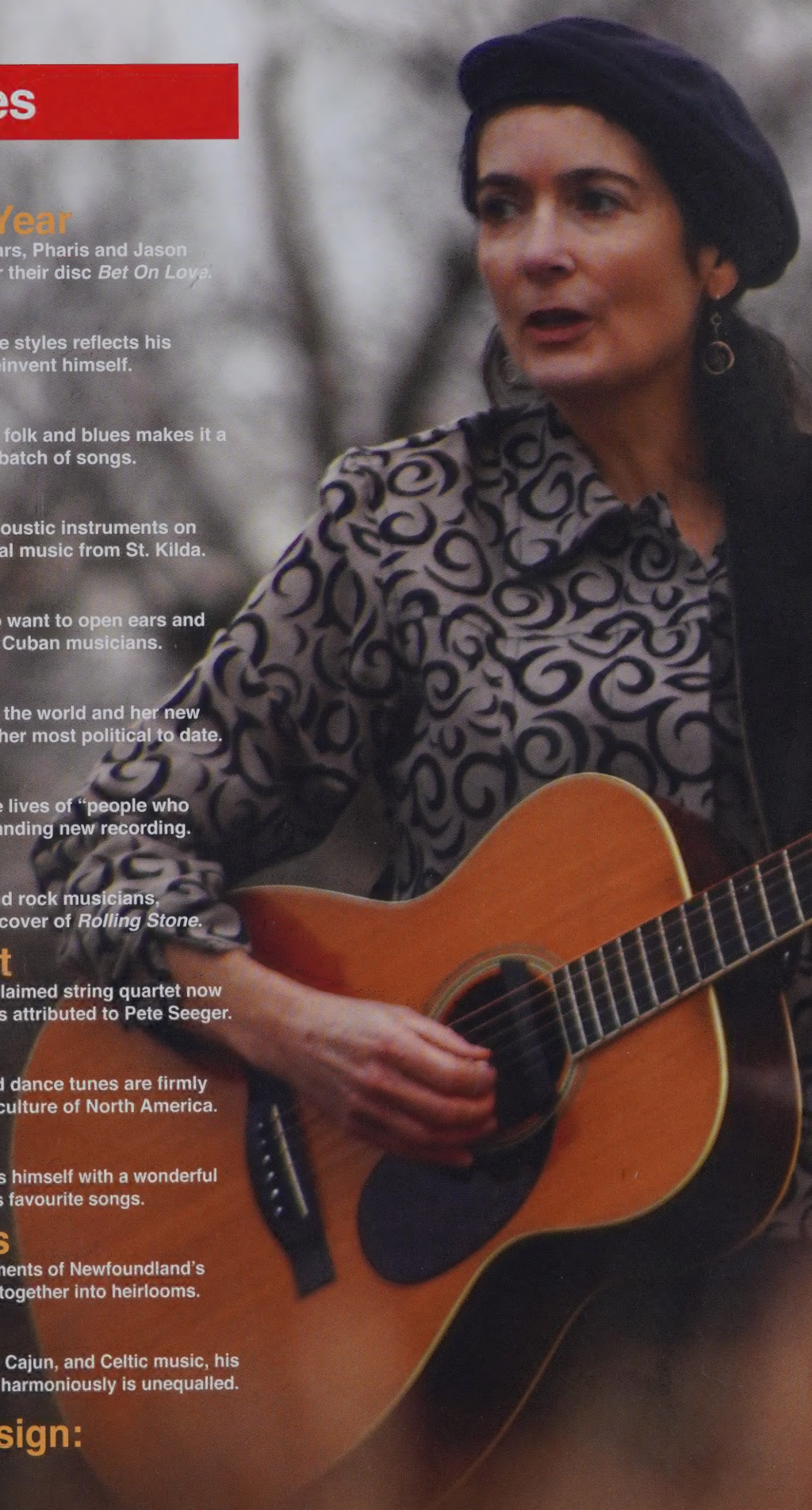


Photo: Maria Dunn



Album of the Year: Pharis & Jason Romero's *Bet On Love*



Emilyn Stam & John David Williams



Kronos Quartet



Hayes Carll



Okan

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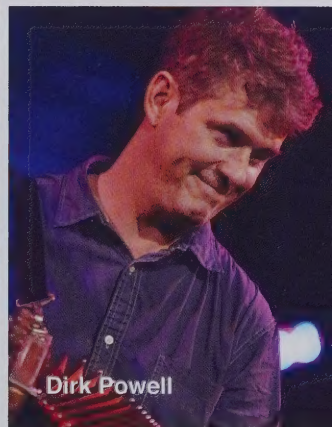
Elvis Costello



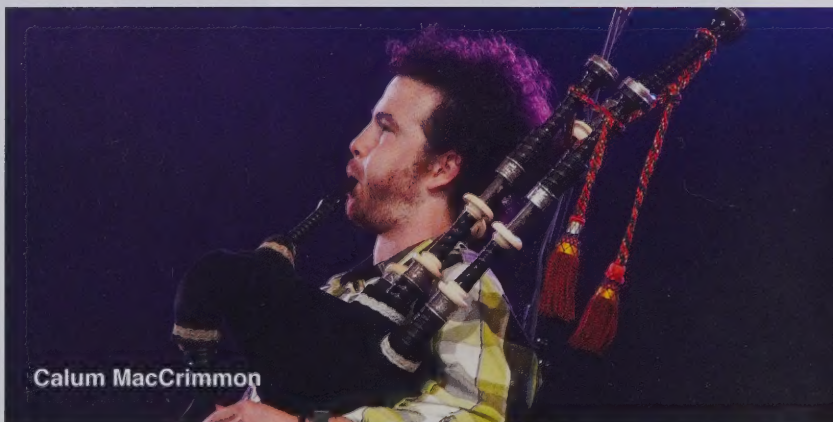
Eliza Gilkyson



Brigid Mae Power



Dirk Powell



Calum MacCrimmon

SIRIUSXM
WORLD GROUP
OF THE YEAR

3 X
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AWARD
NOMINEES

NY TIMES
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BILLBOARD
TOP 10!

3 X
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WINNER

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-Maverick Music Magazine, UK

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stingray radio

1. **Corin Raymond**
Dirty Mansions (Independent)
2. **Ken Whiteley**
Calm in the Eye of the Storm (Borealis)
3. **Rose Cousins**
Bravado (Outside Music)
4. **Jennah Barry**
Holiday (Forward Music)
5. **Lynn Miles**
We'll Look For Stars (Independent)
6. **Corin Raymond**
Dirty Mansions (Independent)
7. **Pharis & Jason Romero**
Bet on Love (Lula)
8. **Rachel Garlin**
Mondegreens (Independent)
9. **Kristen Grainger & True North**
Ghost Tattoo (Independent)
10. **Shaye Zdravec**
Now and Then (Indelible Music)

The most-played folk and roots discs played nationally by Stingray Music throughout Aug., Sept., and October, 2020.

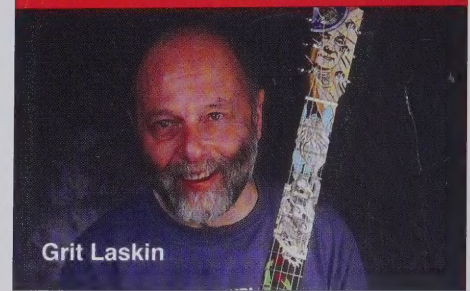
fred's

1. **Ofra Harnoy**
On The Rock (Distribution Select)
2. **Shanneygannock**
Logy Bay Wood Stove Sessions (Avondale)
3. **Matthew Byrne**
Lady Cove: In Concert (Independent)
4. **Sherman Downey**
New Beautiful (Independent)
5. **Rube & Rake**
Leaving With Nothing (Independent)

Based on album sales for Aug., Sept., and October, 2020. at Fred's Records, 198 Duckworth Street, St. John's, NL, A1C 1G5



grit laskin's top 10



Michael Jerome Browne
This Beautiful Mess (Borealis)

The Clutha
Scots Ballads Songs & Dance Tunes (Topic)

Le Vent du Nord
Territoires (Borealis)

Chilly Gonzales
Solo Piano (Universal)

Ewan Maccoll & Peggy Seeger
The Big Hewer (Decca)

Oliver Schroer
Hymns And Her (Borealis)

Laura Smith
Everything Is Moving (Borealis)

Shari Ulrich
Everywhere I Go (Borealis)

Doc Watson
On Stage (Vanguard)

The Weavers
The Weavers At Carnegie Hall, 1955 (Vanguard)

Grit Laskin is the subject of The Penguin Eggs Interview on page 62, where he recounts his career as a folk artist and a celebrated guitar maker.

blackbyrd

1. **Joni Mitchell**
Archives, Vol. 1: The Early Years (1963-1967) (Warner Bros)
2. **Bruce Springsteen**
Letter To You (Columbia)
3. **Bahamas**
Sad Hunk (Barchords / Universal)
4. **Kathleen Edwards**
Total Freedom (Eone)
5. **Colter Wall**
Western Swing & Waltzes & Other Punchy Songs (Thirty Tigers)
6. **Kruangbin**
Mordecai (Dead Oceans)
7. **Phoebe Bridgers**
Punisher (Dead Oceans)
8. **Caleigh Cardinal**
Stories from a Downtown Apartment (Independent)
9. **Sufjan Stevens**
The Ascension (Asthmatic Kitty)
10. **Bob Dylan**
Rough and Rowdy Ways (Columbia)

Based on album sales for Aug., Sept., and October, 2020, at Blackbyrd Music, 10442-82 Ave., Edmonton, AB, T6E 2A2 and at Jan-17 Ave., SW, Calgary, AB, T2T 0B4

irish and uk sales

- Laura Marling**
Song For Our Daughter (Chrysalis/Partisan)
- Jamie Webster**
We Get By (Modern Sky)
- Levellers**
Peace (On The Fiddle)
- Kate Rusby**
Hand Me Down (Pure)
- Seth Lakeman**
A Pilgrim's Tale (BMG)
- Sam Lee**
Old Wow (Cooking Vinyl)
- Jamie Webster**
Boss (Modern Sky)
- Shirley Collins**
Heart's Ease (Domino Recordings)
- Maria McKee**
La Vita Nuova (American Fire)
- Fairport Convention**
Shuffle And Go (Matty Grooves)

Based on album sales of Irish and UK musicians in all formats throughout 2020 until September 11.
<https://www.officialcharts.com/charts/folk-albums-chart/>

10 years ago

- Neil Young**
Le Noise (Reprise)
- Jeremy Fisher**
Flood (Aquarius)
- Ray LaMontagne**
God Willin' And The Creek Don't Rise (Sony)
- Gilles Vigneault**
Retrouailles (Disques Tempête)
- Amelia Curran**
Hunter Hunter (WEA)
- Mavis Staples**
You Are Not Alone (Anti)
- Martha Wainwright**
Sans fusils, ni souliers, à Paris (Republic of Music)
- Sarah Harmer**
Oh Little Fire (Cold Snap)
- Robert Plant**
Band of Joy (Rounder)
- Laura Marling**
I Speak Because I Can (Virgin)

Based on album charts from Penguin Eggs issue No. 48 published in the winter of 2010.



backstreet

- Mike Bravener**
Depends on the Pay (Independent)
- Kruangbin**
Mordecai (Dead Oceans)
- Waxahatchee**
Saint Cloud (Merge)
- William Prince**
Gospel First Nation (Six Shooter Records)
- Sarah Harmer**
Are you Gone (A&C)
- Adrianne Lenker**
Songs and Instrumentals (4AD)
- Brent Mason**
Fireflies (Left Handed Records)
- Fiona Apple**
Fetch the Bolt Cutters (Epic Records)
- Matt Berninger**
Serpentine Prison (Concord Records)
- Gord Downie**
Away Is Mine (A & C)

Based on album sales for Aug., Sept., and October, 2020, at Backstreet Records, at their Saint John and Fredricton, NB, stores.

soundscapes

- Bob Dylan**
Rough and Rowdy Ways (Columbia)
- Neil Young**
Homegrown (Warner Bros.)
- Bruce Springsteen**
Letter To You (Columbia)
- The Jayhawks**
XOXO (Southeastern)
- Kathleen Edwards**
Total Freedom (Eone)
- Bill Callahan**
Gold (DRAG CITY)
- Sarah Harmer**
Are You Gone (Arts & Crafts)
- Lucinda Williams**
Good Souls Better Angels (Highway 20)
- Margo Price**
That's How Rumors Get Started (Universal Music)
- Ron Sexsmith**
Hermitage (Warner Bros.)

Based on album sales for Aug., Sept., and October, 2020, at Soundscapes, 572 College Street, Toronto, ON, M6G 1B3

ckua radio

- Kathleen Edwards**
Total Freedom (Eone)
- Toots & the Maytals**
Got to Be Tough (Trojan Jamaica)
- Khrungbin**
Mordechai (Dead Oceans)
- Cayley Thomas**
How Else Can I Tell You? (Independent)
- Elliott Brood**
Keeper (Six Shooter)
- Tony D.**
Speak No Evil: A Flurry of Instrumentals (Independent)
- Brenna Lowrie**
Loss Leader (Independent)
- Daniel Romano**
Dandelion (You've Changed)
- Fleet Foxes**
Shore (Anti)
- New Moon Jelly Roll Freedom Rockers**
New Moon Jelly Roll Freedom Rockers (Stony Plain)
- The War & Treaty**
Hearts Town (Rounder)
- Colter Wall**
Western Swing & Waltzes & Other Punchy Songs (Thirty)
- Bahamas**
Sad Hunk (Barchords / Universal)
- Toronto Tabla Ensemble**
Unexpected Guests (Independent)
- Bill Callahan**
Gold Record (Drag City)
- Charley Crockett**
Welcome to Hard Times (Thirty Tigers)
- Jess Knights**
Best Kind Of Light (Independent)
- Shaye Zadravec**
Now and Then (Independent)
- Ashley Ray**
Pauline (Soundly)
- Julian Taylor**
The Ridge (Howling Turtle)

The most-played folk, roots and world music discs on CKUA radio – www.ckua.org – throughout August, September, and October, 2020.



The War & Treaty



Lucinda Williams

penguin eggs

The Folk, Roots and World Music Magazine
Issue No.88/89, Winter and Spring, 2020/21
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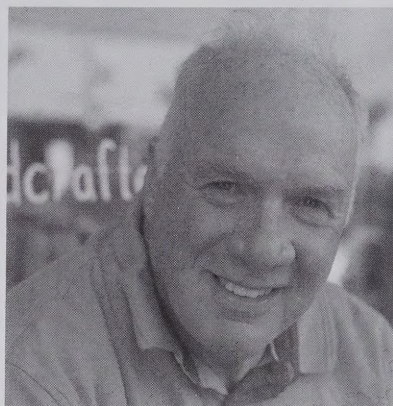
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This magazine takes its name from Nic Jones's wonderful album *Penguin Eggs* — a collection of mainly traditional folk songs revitalized with extraordinary flair and ingenuity. Released in Britain in 1980, it has grown into a source of inspiration for such diverse artists as Bob Dylan, Warren Zevon and Kate Rusby.

Nic, sadly, suffered horrific injuries in a car crash in 1982 and has never fully recovered. In 2010, however, he finally made a brief emotional comeback, performing at several events throughout the summer. His care and respect shown for the tradition and prudence to recognize the merits of innovation makes *Penguin Eggs* such an outrageously fine recording. It's available through Topic Records. This magazine strives to reiterate its spirit.

Penguin Eggs magazine is published and printed in Canada and acknowledges the generous financial support from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. We also acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through Canada Heritage and the Canada Periodical Fund (CPF) distributed through the Canada Council for the Arts.

Editorial



So here we are, then: the very last issue of *Penguin Eggs*. Twenty-three years come and gone. A combination of 88 distinct magazines and e-zines. A remarkable adventure full of exhilarating music created by an assortment of talented, inspiring, and sometimes fragile artists. And none of them featured on the cover more than once.

I was once chastised by a woman complaining of not knowing anyone we wrote about. "Madam," says I, "that is the whole point of this magazine: to highlight the unsung and to tip a hat to the consistently creative."

I'm not the final arbiter of whether we succeeded or not. I can tell you this, though: we tried extremely hard, every issue, to publish unique content that highlighted distinctly creative artists at a certain stage of their careers.

Some, of course, have since fallen by the wayside: The Duhks, The Bills, The Be Good Tanyas... Some have thrived: Kacy & Clayton, Pharis & Jason Romero, Matthew Byrne... And some, sadly, we've lost along the way: Lhasa, John Mann, John Prine... All have been chronicled by a remarkable pool of knowledgeable, insightful writers who duly deserve respect and grateful thanks. They include Tony Montague and les siemieniuk, who started with me on issue No. 1.

Looking back, if there was one article that tickled me more than any other, just for the sheer absurdity of

it all, I'd have to confess that Holger Petersen's interview with Bill Wyman did the trick. An original and critical member of The Rolling Stones' glory years in tiny *Penguin Eggs*! That's a tale worth a round or two.

Now, with an aging editor excited about new projects, the economic fallout from COVID-19, and the insatiable appetite of social media, *Penguin Eggs*' time has come. Let me say this, though: these last two issues are among the best we've ever published. T.S. Eliot: it's better to go out with a bang than a whimper, heads held high.

So to every folk festival, folk club, theatre, convention, record company, author, and artist who took out advertising, thank you profusely for your endearing generosity and support. Consider this as a point of reference: the Edmonton Folk Music Festival and Borealis Records advertised in every single print issue.

It would be imprudent of me not to mention the generous grants we received from various levels of government in Canada. We in the arts here are the envy of the world for such crucial support.

On a more personal note, I'd like to thank Deb Thrall, who took my plastic bags full of crusty receipts and, against all odds, turned them into professional ledgers an accountant could understand. A big thanks also to Doug Swanson, who, from issue No. 18 onwards, took control of the editing of all text and gave it the polish it richly deserved. Edmonton folk festival's Terry Wickham, too, has been an endless source of personal support and encouragement. Slainté. Annemarie Hamilton's love and inspiration helped get this magazine off the ground. She's guided me every positive step of the way. I couldn't possibly have done it without her. And to you, dear reader, without whom it would all have been rather pointless, my sincere and heartfelt gratitude.

—Roddy Campbell

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The Record That Changed My Life



Calum MacCrimmon grew up around pipe bands in Edmonton before moving to Scotland and co-founding Breabach. Here he pays tribute to Michael McGoldrick's indelible album *Fused*.

It was actually my father, Iain MacCrimmon—also a lifelong piper—who first heard a track from Michael McGoldrick's *Fused* in early 2001. It was on the radio and he recommended I check it out. My jaw pretty much hit the floor.

This was my first compelling dose of trad crossover; rhythmical tune playing on low whistles fronting a band of mixed percussion, samples, fiddle solos, and stunning brass lines.

It was everything I wanted, all in one place! I could hear influences that ranged from soul to Celtic, jazz to Eastern, and then—BANG—a heavy trad-focused tune would burst through the middle and reset the metre.

The most striking element beyond the band's enviable musicianship is the sense of fun. It sounds like they had a great time making this record and that is something I have tried to take forward with me on every album I have been involved in.

The day after buying *Fused*, I began learning to play the pennywhistle. The amount of tunes I could play virtually doubled: new technique, more notes, tonguing rhythms, spitting out riffs—mind blown! My ability on the instrument would grow over many years of experience but it all led towards a greater sense of my own creative path.

I co-founded Breabach in 2003 alongside Donal Brown, Patsy Reid, and Ewan Rob-

ertson. In the early days, we were enthusiastically exploring the crossover of folk with modern groove and it was a fantastic new challenge to find ways of involving old melodies with a fresh approach. Many musicians were hanging out at this time, sharing ideas in the Glasgow pub sessions, and it was very cool to have been part of that growing community of 'folkies', 'jazzers', and wonderful people.

So, where did this all lead? In 2008, I started work on my solo album entitled *Man's Ruin*. The starting point on this journey was deciding which ideas to use that best represented me as an individual—a difficult question for any artist. I knew there had to be some serious groove involved—that seemed to be the underpinning characteristic of my tunes, hooks, melodies, and riffs—so I put together a team of groove-based folkies including Paul Jennings (kit), Duncan Lyall (bass), and my right-hand man Innes Watson (guitar).

Between the four of us we pieced together the material I had 'settled on' over a couple of beers in Paul's flat. I had been tinkering away on a funk song about this time, which I felt may have been a step too far away from the album's trad vibe, but I gave the lads a quick rendition.

The level in the room went from eight to ten and we were all bopping away like madmen with big smiles on our faces. In that

moment, *Break Out* became track one of the album. It was now officially a funk-meets-folk ('flunk?') record.

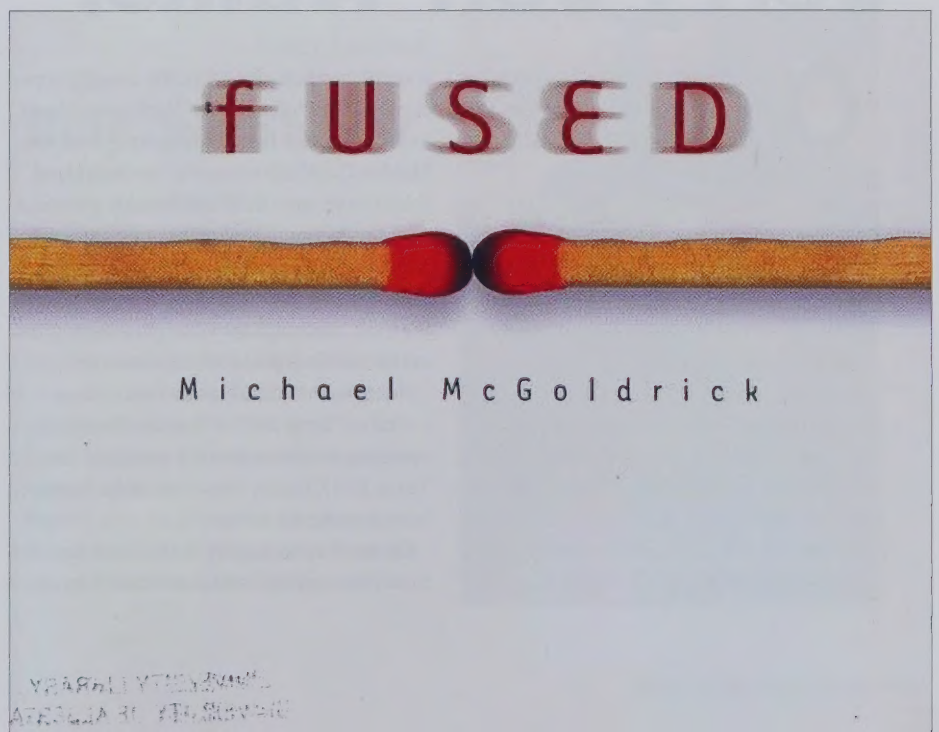
This realisation gave me clarity and confidence that was sorely needed. I was lucky to have spent time in the company of legendary trombonist and brass section leader Rick Taylor. I asked if he and Nigel Hitchcock (saxophone) would join us on certain key areas of the album.

They wrote and recorded on the Isle of Skye and transferred the audio files down to Glasgow with a short note from Rik saying we could use as much or as little as we liked—we used it all. I am forever indebted to those guys for their contribution and inspiring musicality.

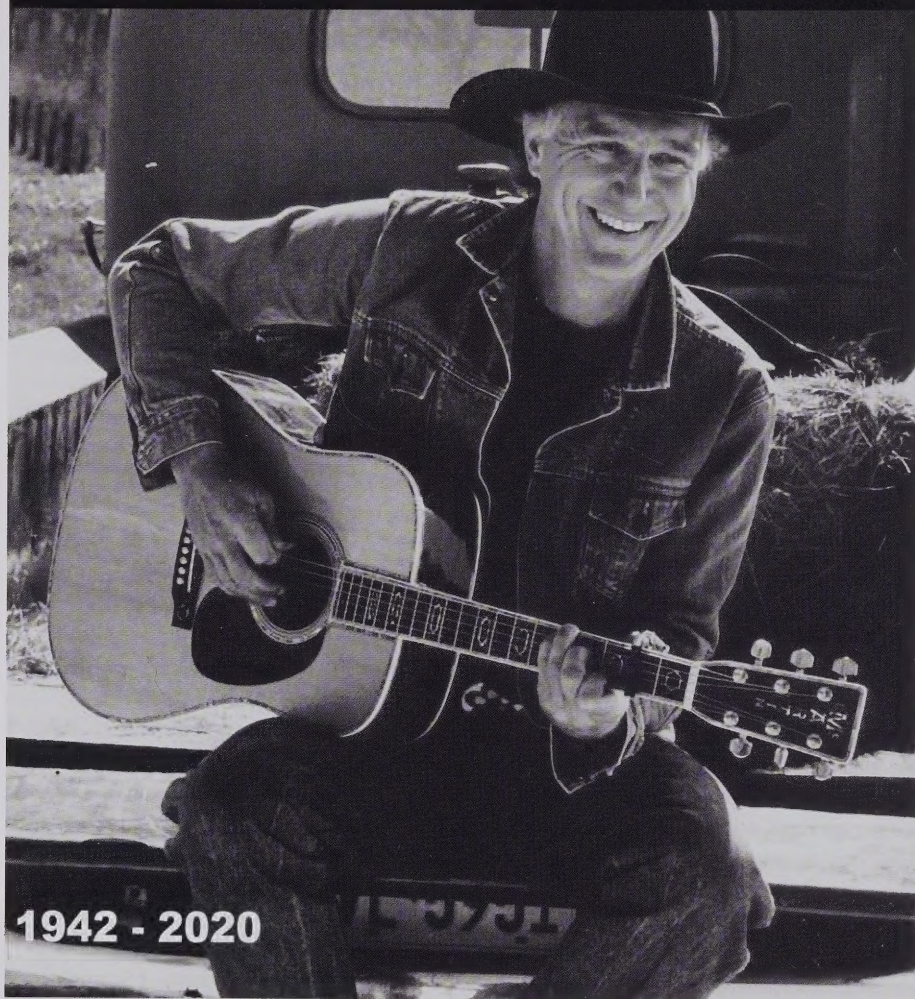
Man's Ruin went from a concept album to us becoming a live band. We played many festivals and recorded a followup band album called *Health and Safety*.

To this day, I am known for that curious brand of crossover on the Scottish folk scene, though I must say I don't think I would have ever fully engaged with that crossing point had I not been on the Glasgow scene, at that time, with those people. My biggest credit and thank you is to Michael McGoldrick, Donald Shaw, and the awesome team that created *Fused*.

It was a ground-breaking trad album and I believe it inspired a generation of Scottish crossover bands.



SWANSONGS



Jerry Jeff Walker

On the passing of Jerry Jeff Walker at 78, a few lines culled from *Stony*, one of his most tender and affecting ballads, come to mind:

"Well you know Stony was a liar / Yes, there's no doubt about it / But just the way he told it / Made you never want to doubt him / For he kept you going when the road got rough / Brought you through all the lean times / By making it up"

In the end, over a lifetime of achievements, perhaps Jerry Jeff's greatest single feat was inventing—and reinventing—himself. That's a terrible cliché, maybe, but perfectly descriptive in this case.

The son of a barkeep and homemaker, he was born Ronald Clyde Crosby in Oneonta,

a small, rustbelt city set in the comely upper Appalachian hills of New York state. However the re-cast Jerry Jeff, having done his Holden Caulfield scarpers to the Southland might have spun it, this is actually gorgeous country. My grandfather had a hobby farm nearby, and I can attest to this personally. John Lennon and Yoko Ono were so taken with the landscape they bought a large parcel of land as a place to retire one day.

But it was other hills—in Texas—that called to "Jerry Jeff" to lionize. Even his speaking accent eventually morphed into a Texas Hill Country drawl/mumble. Somehow, it came off as real.

On the way to destiny in the Lone Star State, the aspiring, self-described "Gypsy

Songman" found himself at somewhere near the tail end of the Greenwich Village "folk scare," as Martin Mull used to joke. And yep, that was a milieu that featured the godhead of Dylan and trickled on down.

Over this time, he conjured up the bona fide American Song Book standard *Mr. Bojangles* after a night in the New Orleans police drunk tank, having cut up rough in a local auberge. (Allow me to suggest that the best-ever recording of the song, available now on *YouTube*, was cut live at NYC's public radio station WBAI, with the brilliant assistance of guitarist David Bromberg and Jerry Jeff's deep, resonant baritone at its best. Forget the (well-meaning) Nitty Gritty Dirt Band version that became a hit, and let's not even consider Sammy Davis Jr.'s Vegas-y take.)

The newly minted Jerry Jeff, complete with Stetson and custom Charlie Dunn cowboy boots, ended up in Austin at pretty well the exact right time. The Armadillo World Headquarters, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Guy Clark, Gary P. Nunn, Jimmy Buffett, the Luckenbach recordings, and Hondo Crouch, Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Kinky Friedman, the Lost Gonzo Band, et al. played a role.

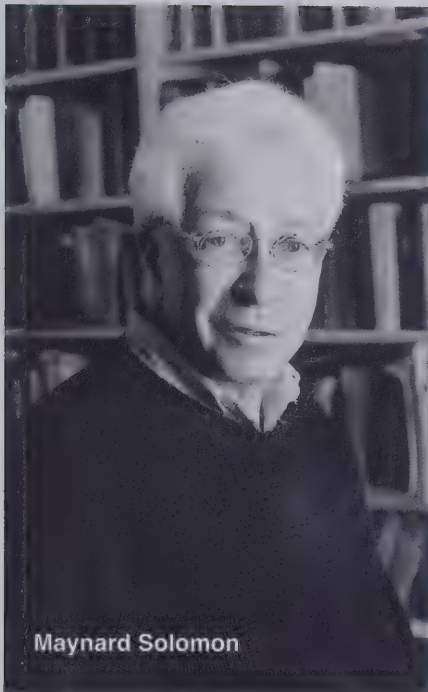
Major record company deals, private jets, bags of white powder, and sundry debauchery eventually gave way to wife Susan taking over the reins and the means of production. They established a template for quality artist-owned commercial endeavour that continues to this day.

As time marched on, they even found a way to monetize yearly trips to a snazzy house in Belize, via a fan hanger-on component that seemed to tickle everyone involved, including local charities. Watching recent clips of an ailing Jerry Jeff trying to sing new songs there and home in Austin tugs at your heartstrings.

An original of his own making to the end, Jerry Jeff Walker got close to the taproot of Americana at its best. He'll be missed.

PS: this will be the last, modest scribbling I've been fortunate enough to contribute to Penguin Eggs, which is sadly fading into the mist, like so many other print worthies. Might I proffer a tip of the old, caved-in porkpie to Roddy Campbell, who has fought the good fight with aplomb and integrity.

— Alan Kellogg



Maynard Solomon

Record Executive and Biographer
Born 1930

With a \$10,000 loan from their father, brothers Seymour and Maynard Solomon founded Vanguard Records in New York City in 1950. While the label initially released classical records, it eventually issued pivotal albums of folk, blues, and jazz.

Indeed, overseen by the Solomons, Vanguard became, arguably, the leading folk and blues label in North America, releasing noted albums by Joan Baez, Ian & Sylvia, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Odetta, The Clancy Brothers, Mississippi John Hurt, the Jim Kweskin Jug Band, Country Joe & the Fish, and numerous others.

Clearly, the Solomon brothers had a lot of credibility in the folk world having released recordings during the McCarthy-era by blacklisted artists such as Paul Robeson and The Weavers. The latter's seminal album *The Weavers at Carnegie Hall*, recorded live on Christmas Eve 1955 but released in 1957, helped spark the urban folk revival later that decade.

Furthermore, under the direction of John Hammond—who would later sign Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, and Bruce Springsteen to Columbia Records—Vanguard released his legendary, ground-breaking *Spirituals to Swing* live recordings taped

in Carnegie Hall in 1938 and 1939 that featured the likes of Big Joe Turner, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, the Count Basie Orchestra, and Big Bill Broonzy (who took the place of the murdered Robert Johnson).

In the summer of 1965, Maynard hired the blues historian Samuel Charters to edit live tapes of the 1964 Newport Folk Festival. Having completed that project, Vanguard then sent Charters to Chicago to capture the broad range of contemporary blues musicians thriving in the Windy City. Those sessions resulted in an historic, 1966, three-album series titled *Chicago/The Blues/Today!*—three albums that immeasurably raised the profiles of Buddy Guy, Junior Wells, Otis Spann, Johnny Shines, Big Walter Horton, Otis Rush, James Cotton, and Charlie Musselwhite. Those artists would dominate the blues scene for decades to come.

By the early 1970s, many of Vanguard's iconic artists had moved on to major labels. A failed attempt to enter the rock market meant it limped along, mainly selling classical records, until being sold in 1985.

Maynard was born on Jan. 5, 1930, in Manhattan, the youngest of three children. He graduated from Brooklyn College in 1950 with a BA in music and English, and continued his studies at Columbia University. With Vanguard out of the way, he wrote critically acclaimed biographies about Mozart and Beethoven. His *Mozart: A Life* was a finalist for the 1996 Pulitzer Prize in biography. He died of Lewy body dementia on Sept. 28 at his apartment in Manhattan. He was 90.

— Roddy Campbell

Billy Joe Shaver

Outlaw Country Pioneer
Born 1939

When Billy Joe Shaver's first album, *Old Five and Dimers Like Me*, came out in 1973, he was unknown to most record buyers.

His debut was produced by Kris Kristofferson, who was already on his way to becoming a superstar. There were no obvious hits on the album but many of them are now country standards.

Shortly after its debut, Waylon Jennings released *Honky Tonk Heroes*, an album that featured four tunes from *Old Five and Di-*

mers: the title track, *Black Rose*, *Willie the Wandering Gypsy and Me*, and *Low Down Freedom*.

That album made Jennings a star, kicked off the Outlaw movement in country music, and established Shaver's reputation as songwriter.

I went to review an early Shaver club date and, after he got offstage, he found me in the audience and asked if I was going to give him a good review. He quickly laughed and told me to "write the truth".

He also gave me his phone number and told me to call him anytime I liked. I did, and interviewed him several times over his career.

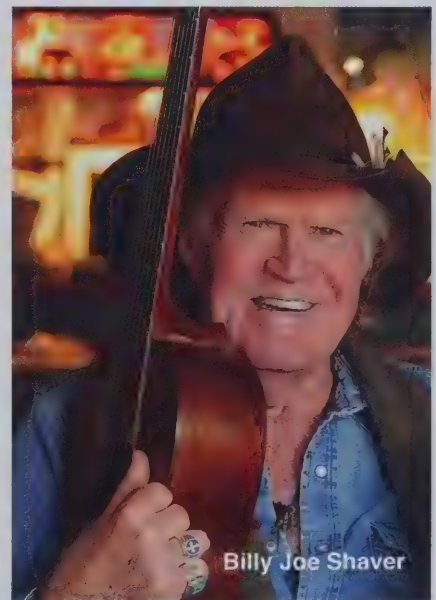
He was always warm and full of compelling stories, including the time he climbed a utility pole to see Hank Williams Sr. perform solo on the loading dock of a meat-packing plant.

Shaver made more than 20 albums in his career. He also made a series of country rock albums with his late son, Eddy Shaver, including *Electric Shaver* and *The Earth Rolls On*.

Like his solo records, they were well-crafted and full of memorable tunes. Shaver's rough, weather-worn voice and basic acoustic guitar skills made him sound like a folksinger but his songwriting skills were phenomenal.

A true road warrior, Shaver was playing live gigs until a year before his death on Oct. 28. He was 81 years old.

— j. poet



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TD READY
COMMITMENT

It's not lost on Chris Luedecke that the album he was in the process of touring before COVID-19 hit was called *Easy Money*.

"It was a kind of foretelling," the Chester, Nova Scotia-based singer/songwriter says with a certain degree of wryness. Canada Emergency Response Benefit proved a bit of a lifesaver. But the banjo player, who performs under the name Old Man Luedecke, didn't stay on the rolls of the unemployed long. After walking over to his neighbour's house to pick up some scallops he was offered a job in the industry. With live gigs now out of the question, Luedecke decided to take him up on it.

Tom Murray spoke with Luedecke about scallop farming, his ambivalence about Internet concerts, and an unexpected new musical instrument.

After 2020, nobody can accuse Old Man Luedecke of not having his bona fides as an authentic, blue-collar folk musician.

Yeah, there's absolutely something romantic about this, but yesterday I was standing with my face to the north wind all day and that wasn't a great deal of fun. Still, it's a job that really gives shape to things. I know I'm not going to do this forever, so that makes it kind of liberating.

Here's a landlubber question: how do you farm scallops?

Well, it's not what people think of when they think of scallop farming. There are these sort of maverick scallop farmers that are a bit mad, really. My boss worked as a tech at Dalhousie for years, but he quit because his dream was to be responsible for himself, so he became an independent scallop farmer. They have these buoys in the water with long lines hanging between them and a big anchor at the end. The scallops hang in nets down there and grow. It's not a traditional fishery, not in the way that people imagine. In a way, it's like the independent folk music version of scallop farming.

You didn't opt for Internet concerts after live gigs were shut down.

I was very reluctant to do an ersatz version of a live show for a long time, mostly because I'd had my fill of actual live shows. It's a new set of challenges, and eventually I found a spot where I could do a show even with the deafening silence when I did *Celtic Colours* in Cape Breton in October. I didn't know that



there wouldn't be any kind of audience until I got there, so it was weird, but at least I had that experience.

Have you been making music at all?

I've been doing music instruction for a local organization, teaching ukulele to kids in people's homes for the last two weeks. I'm not a ukulele player by any stretch of the imagination, so that's interesting. It's neat to watch the brain work in different ways; it gives me hope.

Now that you're officially in the industry, you can turn your experiences into authentic East Coast fishing songs.

It's amazing the jargon that you hear on the boats. Just this beautiful language that the fishermen use with each other. It's kind of great. I want to be there during lobster season because apparently when they get on the CB the language it's really fun.

Have you started any songs referencing your new trade?

I did write one very jargon-heavy scallop farm song. Given the name of your magazine and the album [by Nic Jones] where it came from it's actually quite wonderful that we're talking about this. Like the song [on *Penguin*

Eggs] about the humpback whale; I feel that album gave me liberty to write songs like that.

Usually at the end of an interview I like to ask an artist what's coming up next. That seems pointless now, given that none of us know what will be up next.

It's strange, isn't it? I had a new record [*Easy Money*] that I was in the midst of touring, which I was doing last fall, and would have carried on through until now. It's hard to put myself in the mindset of new songs when I haven't properly represented the new album. They're so fresh, and many of the songs seem to be a commentary on the current situation. It's hard to imagine writing new songs when you have songs that already speak to the situation, you know?

So you're stuck in limbo?

Well, no. I am writing, and I just got an amp from Long & McQuade.

You're going to feed your banjo through your amp?

Oh, no. I've tried that before and it was never a happy result. This might seem frightening, but I've got a Telecaster and I sit in the basement playing it for the sheer boyish fun of it.

Re-introducing Michael Brook

Almost 20 years since he appeared on the first-ever hard-copy edition of *Penguin Eggs*, pioneering Toronto-born musician, composer, and producer Michael Brook marvels at how much the music world has changed.

"I guess it was not long after I moved to Los Angeles in 1999 that the album world I was in started to disappear. Luckily, I started to get more soundtrack work."

Today, Brook's page at IMDb.com lists about 70 credits for his film and television soundtrack efforts, with notable pictures such as *Brooklyn*, *An Inconvenient Truth*, and *The Fighter*, and Golden Globe and Grammy nominations. His last pure music release and concert tour came in 2008 with Armenian flute player Djivan Gasparyan, tied to their album *Penumbra*.

Brook points to factors like piracy, streaming, and travel costs to explain why it just doesn't pay any more to attempt the sort of ground-breaking cross-cultural collaborative efforts he tackled with the likes of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Gasparyan, and others for labels such as Real World back in the 1980s and '90s. Including hits such as *Mustt Mustt* and *Night Song*, Brook produced about 10 albums for Real World at a time that now seems like a golden age for global music innovations.

"Things like Real World, both the studio and the label, were a big driver for a lot of that and [founder] Peter Gabriel used his position to help people discover that they had an appetite for things outside their culture. Novelty was a factor and the economics were different.

"I miss working with those musicians and collaborators, but I still get to make music I like, have it heard, and explore things. There's a different collaborative process with film directors, too."

For many years, Brook has added a new "sketch" or two every day to his Sketch Library, now a huge stock of mostly shorter works you can listen to or download at his website. It's a natural marketing tool to get people interested in licensing or commissioning new works and those sketches are the starting point for about 95 per cent of his soundtrack work.

Starting with guitar and his early studies in electronic music at Toronto's York University, Brook's unique career began with touring alongside experimentalist Jon Hassell and vocal lessons from the legendary Lamonte Young before he made his own album debut, *Hybrid*, with Brian Eno in 1985. He even hit radio success in the pop band Martha & the Muffins before his innovative infinite guitar technology was borrowed by U2's *The Edge* and the two co-produced Sinead O'Connor's debut.

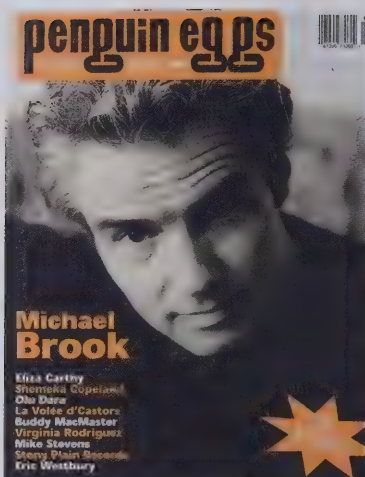
Using the infinite guitar and other electronics, Brook's 1992 cross-Canada solo tour for *Cobalt Blue* and its companion disc *Live At The Aquarium* remain one of the best examples this fan has ever witnessed of a one-man band. Guitar remains his foundation, but the studio is his real instrument.

He is still trying to make sense of how people consume music today.

"Now I find it harder to find music to listen to. You're just overwhelmed. It's a bit like tap water, borderline free, so people aren't as invested in discovering music."

Right now he's excited about the imminent release of his soundtrack for the film *Embattled*, but Brook's original career trajectory continues to influence things today. He guesses his reputation with global sounds was one reason that he was asked to create soundtracks for several Indian films and two more for pictures set in the Middle East.

"I didn't always realize the depth of things at the time, but what an amazingly lucky experience that was."



By Roger Levesque

RUBE & RAKE

LEAVING WITH NOTHING



Introducing

Rube & Rake

“The year didn’t happen how we thought it would,” says Andrew Laite. While that’s the case for all of us, it’s particularly true for him and Josh Sandu, who perform as Rube & Rake. They began the year with a new album, *Leaving With Nothing*, intending to tour it for five weeks in the West, then continue through the summer in the East. The first of a dozen western dates was to have been April 23.

“It’s hard to feel like you have a purpose,” Laite admits, though there is a glimmer that the long night may be, slowly, coming to an end.

“Today we’re rehearsing a couple of songs, get ready for tomorrow,” which will be the first of two sold-out, in-person, COVID-compliant shows in St. John’s.

“We’re getting geared up for that, and just kind of going through what it is now to play live music with COVID.”

The album marks, if not a departure, then at least a significant development from their freshman release, 2017’s *Back and Forth*. There, says Sandu, “we really tried to stay to minimalist arrangements.”

On this new album there are new ideas, new approaches, and a wealth of new sounds, from Dobro to organ.

“I remember walking into the studio one day and Andrew had an electric guitar out,” says Sandu. “I remember being so upset and angry because I thought there would be no way that we’d ever have an electric guitar on our record.” But he went with it, and there is. And mellotron, too.

“We just kind of pulled that thread on the songs and just saw where they went...just shedding this image that we had of ourselves. Working on the songs and seeing where they lead.”

Where they lead was to a very big, complex, uncertain world. The songs were written and recorded prior to the pandemic, yet there are moments when they seem to reference the kinds experiences we’ve collectively been living through. The characters that populate the songs are making the most of cribbage, and searching for something, and feeling the weight of the passing moments.

“May have thought we were headed,” sings Sandu, “For some critical mass / Seems all the while we were waiting for all of / our time to pass.”

The settings are delicate, moving across the musical landscape just as they move across the geographic landscape of the country (“*Alberta in the fall to keep me fed / winter in the East to wet my lips... somewhere there’s a place to lay my head.*”) and draw on a vocabulary of displacement.

Laite grew up in Newfoundland, Sandu grew up in Prince George, BC, though it’s hard to imagine that the two come, superficially, from such different places.

Their vocals would be called sibling harmony, were they actually siblings. The arrangements come from the string band tradition and they navigate around a single microphone, just as a traditional bluegrass band might.

“I think we’re influenced by older music,” says Sandu, “but I think we’ve got a foot in the past and a foot in the present. ... We’re definitely not trying to reinvent any sort of wheel,” though the goal is what it’s ever been, “connecting with people on that organic level, in that organic way. Giving them something that can help them.”

Like hope. “*Come springtime, my dormancy will end,*” sings Sandu, “*And I’ll cast all my boots of heavy lead ... There has to be a place to lay my head.*”

Yes. One with a vaccine.

By Glen Herbert



Introducing Brigid Mae Power



It is haunting, the world one enters with Brigid Mae Power. Her voice, more a vehicle than a vocal, blows moods and sub-currents through the words and phrases in her songs—songs for which she loses all sense of time and space once they are written and complete.

“It’s really a weird thing,” she tells me as we Zoom, Belfast to Galway. “I usually can’t remember at all where I wrote [them]. I’m the same with my art works and drawings; I see something and I have no idea when I drew it. I like it that way, though. It keeps it a bit more like they’re almost little gifts that come to you, rather than grafting.”

Galway-based multi-instrumentalist singer/songwriter Brigid Mae Power was born in London to an Irish family. And while her mum’s taste in music of all styles was an ongoing influence, they would, “Go to my nan’s for Easter or Christmas and it was always songs, singing old Irish songs.”

Learning to play traditional music started at nine or 10 years.

“It was always unquestionable to me,” she recalls as we pour through the chronology of how this all started. She played an open mic in East London for a while, and before that sang covers in a blues bar in the city. But it wasn’t until she heard the mighty Tim Buckley that her own voice began to prevail.

“When I heard Tim Buckley I could hear strains of Irish in his voice, but also just very him... I started letting go of what I thought I should sound like. [Then] the writing just unfolded naturally.”

A mother now herself, Power released her third studio album, *Head Above The Water*, in June 2020. Recorded in analogue at Glasgow’s not-for-profit Green Door recording studio, production was shared between Power, folk musician Alasdair Roberts, and musician/composer (and husband) Peter Broderick.



“Alasdair had some really good ideas, like the song, *Wearing Red That Eve*, that was originally a guitar song. ...I think he totally transformed [it].

“[Peter] did technical stuff, the mixing; the stuff that isn’t my world. I have a strong vision of what I want the thing to sound like but...I’m just trying to figure that out as a woman in the music world.

“It’s hard when you receive such backlash every step of the way, really, when you try and say what you want, sound wise. So, I think it’s taken me a while to be able to express myself to a bunch of dudes. It’s not easy because even the best of them, a lot of the time, want to take over.”

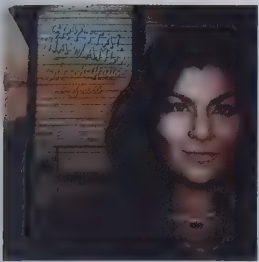
Not with these dudes, though. Traditional folk with a keen new country thread, *Head Above The Water* gives Power a translucent siren of a platform from which to steer that vehicle, her voice, through a collection of deeply, courageously personal songs.

Take the song *Wedding Of A Friend*, for example.

“I kind of like saying it as it is,” she tells me. “I like directness. ...I think I was writing that for years.”

An artist of potent and unbound talents, Brigid Mae Power’s *Head Above The Water* is available at www.brigidmaepower.com

By Cara Gibney



Introducing Crystal Shawanda

Crystal Shawanda has found her true voice, one that will make the hairs on the back of your neck stand to attention—rich, powerful, nuanced, and soulful.

It's not like the voice was shy, hiding somewhere. As the Anishinaabe artist from Ontario puts it, "I started singing as soon as I could make noise". But with the recently released album *Church House Blues* she feels her evolution from country girl to full-tilt blues mama is complete.

"With my first blues albums I was trying really hard to be accepted as a blues artist," says Shawanda, who for 20 years has made Nashville her home. "Sometimes I was afraid to be myself because it wouldn't be thought of as blues. After we had a lot of success with *VooDoo Woman* [2018] I think I won people over, who said, 'you have every right to be singing the blues. Just go for it'. And when we wrote and picked the songs for *Church House Blues* it was just me being me. This was my definitive voice."

The journey of discovery has been long. Shawanda first jumped onstage when she was six.

"I would go to every talent show, variety night, open mic, Christmas concert—anything I could find. When I was 10, I started getting paid to do it. I grew up on Manitoulin Island [in Lake Huron] and all the townships and the reservations there would hire me, the white communities, too, so I got a lot of support. Singing is all I've ever done—there's never been a plan B."

Shawanda started out professionally as a country singer and had a Top 20 hit on country radio, but her experiences as an Indigenous woman moved her inexorably closer and closer to the blues.

"We've grown up with a lot of the same oppression and resilience as black people, and both cultures have used music and humour to get us through. We can feel the pain that's coming through in the blues, and how it's used to heal—to get out all that bad stuff, that anger, that sadness. Sing it out, play it out. And once you're done you feel like you're strong enough to face whatever is going to come your way next."

The late Etta James is Shawanda's greatest inspiration.

"I love the passion she would put into her performances. You could tell this wasn't just her job—singing was her way of survival. Even as a kid I could hear her heart breaking through the speakers when I would listen to her, and she showed me again and again—'this is how you're gonna get through'."

"I also learned from her mistakes. At some points in my life I've battled alcohol abuse and the whole party lifestyle that musicians get pulled into. I worked really hard to find the healthier way of dealing with the heartbreaks of my life, and I went deeper into the music and stepped away from that side of things."

On *Church House Blues*, songs such as *Rather Be Alone*, *When It Comes To Love*, and *Bigger Than The Blues*—all written with husband Dewayne Strobels, also her lead guitarist and producer—are filled with the raw emotion and urgency pouring from Shawanda's throat.

"I feel like I created my voice out of pure stubbornness because I just wanted to sing so damn much," she says with a laugh.

"I've always had a raspy voice. As I grew I learned how to control and manage it—how to suppress it when I want, bring it out when I want. I think my voice comes from a place of survival—and I truly believe that music saved my life."

By Tony Montague



Introducing

Emilyn Stam & John David Williams

Emilyn Stam and John David Williams



A young woman joins the Valley Youth Fiddlers in Smithers, BC, and plays Celtic and dance music. She comes under the fiddling tutelage of Daniel Lapp and Oliver Schroer. She moves on to the Netherlands to study piano but instead becomes involved in French traditional music, which she subsequently introduces her future husband to.

Meanwhile in Toronto, a young man takes a musical journey starting on classical clarinet and travels through rock and jazz until he gets into traditional music. He finds folk styles that include clarinet, like klezmer and Eastern European music, and is then introduced to French traditional music by his future wife.

Meet Emilyn Stam and John David Williams, exponents of Balfolk. Balfolk can be translated as folk ball or folk dance, as Stam explains.

“That term is relatively new—it’s been used for 40 or 50 years, describing the revival of social folk dancing in Western Europe, a lot of it coming from France. It’s spread to a lot of countries and evolved, too.

“Now when people talk about Balfolk it’s a modern take on traditional dancing. In a village they’d maybe dance one or two, then a few kilometres down the road they’d be different. Now we dance a variety of dances in one place.”

The duo’s debut Balfolk album is entitled *Honeywood*, which, as John explains, is special to them.

“We got married there. It was a magical place where our friends who played for Balfolk dances came. So we decided to have the Big Branch Balfolk Festival there the year after our wedding. Some bands from France came and played.

“We have been organizing smaller events in Toronto for the past seven years—somewhere comfortable and social, where people could come in and learn the dances and also the tunes.

“We met Tangi Ropars when we were all in Lemon Bucket Orkestra. He’s from Brittany and grew up with these dances—it’s ingrained into how he walks. When he heard that I was excited about French traditional dancing we started Balfolk in Toronto together.”

As well as playing the traditional tunes associated with the schottisches, rondos, mazurkas, bourrées, and other couple and group dances, they’re also writing new ones.

“We did study the form,” says Williams. “We tried to figure out how the musical phrases relate to the dance. Our main

goal was to make them good for dancing.”

“It’s been interesting to figure out how to be creative within the restraint of wanting people to be able to do a specific dance to it,” says Stam. “The dance always comes first!”

“Folk dancing is out of the question right now,” Williams continues. “You can’t really get a bunch of strangers together and get them to hold hands and change partners. That part of our life we’re really missing right now.”

Let’s all wish for that to change for the better before too much longer.

By Tim Readman





Introducing Ross Ainslie

It's a question that will be asked for years to come. So, pilgrim, what did you do during lockdown? 'Not a lot', 'I starved' or 'I died of boredom' will be the answer of many jobbing musicians. "I've actually been doing a lot of labouring work," says Ross Ainslie, celebrated piper, whistle player, composer and one of Scotland's finest multi-instrumentalists. Oh yes, and he released an album. An exceptionally good one, as it happens.

It's called 'Vana', in homage to the Wellness Retreat in India, which effectively inspired it. Ross booked in there to recharge his batteries following a difficult period in his life that he now refers to as 'burn-out'. "My mental health has not been great over the years in general. I stopped drinking about eight years ago and been left to my own thoughts a lot, dealing with the past. I get down days, but I'm lucky to have music as an outlet. Writing is like therapy for me."

Vana - located in Dehradun, near the foothills of the Himalayas and which means forest in Sanskrit - did the trick. Its philosophy of 'harmony, nourishment and wellbeing' not only provided the reflective time and means for Ross to re-boot his life, but inspired the tenderly affecting themes on his fourth solo album. Featuring telling contributions from the likes of Damien O'Kane on banjo, Cormac Byrne on percussion, Steve Byrnes and Steve Cooney on guitar, Duncan Chisholm on fiddle, Shahbaz Hussain on tabla and Paul Towndrow on sax, it draws from many varied sources. Ross's own Scots traditional inclinations blend almost seamlessly into jazz and different facets of world music... all accompanied by a heartfelt plea from its creator that the music be embraced as one complete piece rather than a disparate assortment of individual tracks.

"I think of this and my previous album 'Sanctuary' as journey albums," he says. "I'm trying to take people with me on that journey and experience the whole flow."

Aha! So it's a protest against downloading and the world of Spotify?

"No, not really. I don't disapprove of it. It has its place, but it has gone too far now and we have to live with it. My game plan was a continuous one-track album but you can't get radio play if you do that."

His musical diversity is well reflected on a proud CV that includes his early brilliant work with the Northern Irish uilleann piper Jarlath Henderson and the groundbreaking, genre-busting bands Salsa Celtica, Treacherous Orchestra and India Alba, with whom he first started exploring Indian music and culture.

Perhaps the most striking track on 'Vana' is 'Wisdom In The Chaos', which features John Wilson - a legendary figure in the pipe band community - who performs canntaireachd, an ancient Gaelic form of singing tunes, with accompaniment from Ross on the whistle. "I never really got into playing pibroch but John is a master. I call him the Keith Richard of the pipes!

"I grew up playing the pipes and love them but I'm not passionate about that solo piping scene. Whenever I heard the pipes playing with other instruments that's what really fired me up. Listening to Gordon Duncan's albums, even just guitar with pipes, a spark went off. Wolfstone was a big influence when I was younger, and Shooogenifty. I was always a folkie, but more <http://www.rossainslie.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/DSC3735-1-scaled.jpg> with fusion aspects of what was happening in Scotland at that time. And then with Salsa Celtica I got into the Latin rhythms and then with India Alba for about ten years we'd go to India once or twice a year. Travelling to different countries with these people will naturally immerse you into it all."

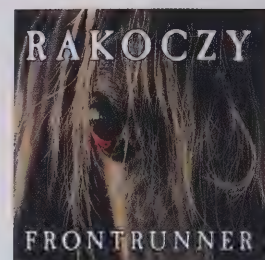
And once all this pandemic stuff is over, he's keen to do what he does best and get back on the road.

"I can't wait."

By Colin Irwin



Introducing Fruzsina Rakoczy



Born in Budapest, the multi-instrumentalist, traditional singer, and classically trained pianist Fruzsina Rakoczy, was eight years old when she moved to Manchester.

"Strangely, my musical identity is not one of the [many] things I have to thank them for," she explains of her medically trained parents, now working proudly in the NHS.

"Both of them would look at my influences and tut! My father instilled in me a love for classical and started me on the path of my musical education, and my mother gifted me her love of singing, but musically, I was quite rudderless."

It seems this sense of being rudderless created space for all music to feel accessible to Rakoczy. From traditional to rock to steam punk and far beyond, her influences are unfeigned, ancient, modern, and crafted with a classical musician's ear.

"What draws me to them are performance and style. I love how genres all have different tool sets to achieve often fairly similar things, and the end goal is always a very intimate, human form of communication."

This far-reaching musical curiosity has led Rakoczy to many and various musical instruments.

"Believe it or not, [bag]pipes and [hurdy] gurdy were deep-seated childhood aspirations of mine," she explains of just two of the instruments she plays. "They're both solo instruments with harshness and vibrance, primal, difficult to play with other instruments whilst clearly a perfect pair together. The icing on the cake was that they are forbidden fruit for women on the Hungarian trad scene. I simply couldn't not."

In August 2020, Rakoczy released her debut album, *Frontrunner*, a collection of original and traditional songs exploring how the horse has been depicted in British folklore. It's a natural fit.

"Much of British folk concerns itself with a world that no longer exists, and in many ways horses are its last remnants to a living audience," she points out.

"Much of the canon has a deep disjoint from our experiences, and I feel a lot of performers never acknowledge this, or even actively try to erase it. Many folk audiences don't associate paganism with their own culture, something else

I wanted to challenge... [And] so many of our songs," she continues, "horsey or not, celebrate winners over losers, neatly sidestepping the cruelty and sacrifices that come with fierce competition."

Within the collection, the music of travellers is a natural thread. "The real challenge," she tells me, "[was] ensuring *Frontrunner* was not an appropriation but a celebration of traveller songs."

The first time she heard Romany Gypsy singer Mary Ann Hayne, she fell in love.

"I'd never heard an English voice command that much power and presence, and she reminded me strongly of Sebestyén Márta and Palya Bea. Moreover, it's repertoire many singers won't touch; I felt there was a mirroring of how the last remaining voices of something supposedly so precious are cast by the wayside for not completing the fantasy. I truly hope I have done it justice, and treated it with understanding and sensitivity."

This isn't the last we're going to hear from Rakoczy. With a new album on its way and additional projects ongoing, it's worth looking out for this fiercely authentic, innovative talent.

www.rakoczymusic.co.uk

By Cara Gibney



Changing their name was a good idea. The traditional music trio Cécilia, which recently released its beguiling debut album *Accent*, began life as Turmel-Leahy-Schreyer.

The original moniker, comprising the surnames of the three band members, was logical but a mouthful. “We wanted something simpler, and it was important to have a bilingual name because we’re all in Québec,” says button accordionist Timi Turmel, a three-time Québec accordion champion. Then band member Erin Leahy’s niece suggested Cécilia, which is Leahy’s middle name.

That made perfect sense because it was Erin Leahy, a pianist and part of the Juno-winning folk music family group Leahy, who was the connecting thread for the trio, which formed in 2017.

“I’ve known Erin and her family for years. When I was young I used to compete against her brother, Donnell,” says Louis Schreyer, a multi-award-winning Canadian fiddle champion. He had played occasionally with Erin Leahy, as had Turmel. Then Schreyer met Turmel when the two were teaching at Leahy Music Camp, a long-running family operation in Lakefield, ON, and the trio sprang up.

The three joined forces because, “We saw the opportunities of creativity and new arrangements that we could actually pull off. We could feed off each other and pull out even more creativity,” says Schreyer.

The band started working on *Accent*, a spirited collection of cover tunes, in 2018. It was supposed to be released last April, but then the pandemic hit and the release, along with a clutch of spring and summer gigs, was postponed. Now that the album has seen the light of day, its respectful but fresh take on traditional music will win over trad fans and convert more than a few others. Case in point: the waltz *Hommage à Dorothée*, a piano-led tribute to the late traditional artist Dorothée Hogan by the also-late Quebec composer Philippe Bruneau, who collaborated extensively with Hogan.

“I grew up in a tradition where waltzes were loved by my family,” says Leahy. “I think with [*Hommage*] there’s a little more of a classical influence. Instead of copying what Dorothée did, which was wonderful, I discovered other colours—I think there’s a bit of a Latin influence in some sections.”

Schreyer takes the spotlight on *Whalley Range*, a medley that opens with Michael McGoldrick’s much-recorded slip jig *Farewell to Whalley Range*.

“The medley shapes up to an exciting set of tunes that ends with *Lad O’Beirne*,” says Schreyer. “I remember doing *Lad O’Beirne* with Erin and Timi before the CD was a thought. We have lots of fun doing it.”

Turmel takes centre stage for the album’s closer, *The High Reel*. The tune moves at lightning speed but Turmel’s every note is clear and strong. “It’s practice,” he says. “Everything you want to do in your life, you practice if you want to reach that level.”

The trio finally brought tunes like these back to the stage in September, when they played Montreal’s Festival La Grande Rencontre of traditional music and dance.

Playing in front of an audience again “felt wonderful; it felt like home,” says Leahy. “[Playing live] reminds us we’re part of a bigger ecosystem of art, community, expression... It’s all a very significant part of our human experience.”

By Pat Langston



Introducing Taraf Syrianna

“We were rehearsing when a mortar struck the music conservatory complex in Damascus in 2014,” remembers violinist Omar Abou Afach, who performed both violin and viola with Syria’s National Orchestra from 1993-2015. The attack caused numerous casualties at the arts centre. “After the bombing stopped we were sure that no one would attend that evening’s concert. But when we got there, the hall was full. Even during wartime, people came to every cultural event. It was only place where people could get a breath of normal life.”

Abou Afach has since immigrated to Montréal, and is part of an extraordinary new ensemble called Taraf Syriana, a quartet of conservatory-trained virtuosi. The group is dedicated to the folk music of Syria and its neighbours.

“Taraf” is the Romani word for musical group. The Domani, the Romani community of Syria, was estimated to be 250,000 before the war. Taraf Syriana’s first video features a tango written by Mohammed Abdul-Karim (1911-1989), who was regarded as one of Syria’s most renowned composers and performers. “He was known in Syria as ‘The Paganini of the bouzouki,’” explains Abou Afach.

Reminiscent of Abdul-Karim, the members of Taraf Syriana often push the boundaries of how their instruments are typically played. Before immigrating to Canada, Naeem Shanwar worked as a professor of music from the University of Homs, Syria (2012-2013) where he taught kanun, a 78 stringed instrument, which dates back nearly 4,000 years. “My message now is to keep spreading this amazing instrument to everyone,” explains Shanwar who is also the author of *Teaching Kanun to Children*. In concert, he is known for taking the instrument to new levels including performing “Winter” from Vivaldi’s “Four Seasons” as a kanun concerto.

Taraf Syriana’s repertoire also includes Romani music from the Balkans. “Jovano Jovanke,” tells a Romeo and Juliet-type story of parents who want to keep their teenagers apart romantically. Taraf Syriana gives it a stunning makeover with Naeem Shanwar’s spectacular kanun solos. “This folk song is so popular,” explains accordionist Sergiu Popa. “Multiple countries are still arguing about its origins.” If anyone could settle the dispute, it’s Popa, who is a living encyclopedia of Eastern European folk music. An instructor at Montreal’s Concordia University, Popa grew up in Chişinău, Moldova and is part of one of Europe’s Romani musical dynasties. “In Moldova, I’d often perform at weddings. They are three days long. One guest would request a song from Turkey, another wanted to hear music from Serbia, or Ukrainian, klezmer, Hungarian, Russian, Bulgarian or Moldovan music. You sleep for just 3-4 hours a day, and perform for 20 hours a day – for three days!”

The group’s cellist, Noémy Braun is a graduate from the University of Music Lausanne (HEMU) in Switzerland, McGill University’s Schulich School of Music in Montréal. She’s also the creator of a cello-like instrument with two additional strings called the “sestacorda.” “I wanted to imitate instruments such as the kemenche (a bowed instrument from the Eastern Mediterranean) and the guimbri (a 3-stringed box-lute from Morocco).” The versatile sestacorda became a key part during Taraf Syriana’s debut concert, where they headlined the 2020 TD Festival du Monde Arabe de Montréal.

It was at that festival where Taraf Syriana wowed both the hosts and online audience (pandemic safety protocols). One of the highlights was “Kevoke,” (the Dove), a Kurdish folk song popular in parts of Turkey, Syria Iraq and Iran. The Kurds are the world’s largest “stateless people” (approximately 40 million, with approximately 2.6 million in Syria before the war) and represent Syria’s largest ethnic minority. “This program is our dream,” explains Omar Abou Afach, about the group’s project to recreate the sound of Syria’s public squares. “We want to share the incredible musical diversity of all of Syria’s peoples.”

By Daniel Rosenberg





Introducing Silver Wolf Band

Labrador is often referred to as “The Big Land” by its residents. The nickname, accredited to CBC broadcaster Winston White, sprung from White’s reaction to a three-hour flight from Goose Bay to Nain that spanned the vast and imposing interior of the region. Encompassing mountains, valleys, isolated bays, and ancient coastal outposts, the landscape of Labrador features prominently in the lyrics of Silver Wolf Band, a four-piece, Indigenous folk-pop-rock group from Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

“It has to do with being from a place that is so geographically and culturally distinct as Labrador,” explains lead singer/guitarist, Jamie Jackman. “You almost don’t really have a choice; the place works its way into whatever artistic endeavour you’re pursuing. The inspiration is all around you and it lends itself to your ideas.

“We still sing songs about love, and our kids, and the kinds of things that other people write about, but where we live gives our songs a bit of an edge and puts a different flavour on those topics.”

Jackman and his bandmates Matthew Barrett (piano, keyboards), Justin Jackman (drums, percussion), and Brandon Pardy (bass), have known one another all their lives and have played together as a band since 2007.

“When we were younger, we played punk music and metal—normal high school stuff. We wanted to get more into songwriting, so we switched over to folk-rock to develop a more mature sound.”

The entire band participates in the songwriting process, but Jackman is the instigator.

“I use a couple of different analogies: I write the lyrics and create the bones of the song, and then bring it to the guys and we all put meat on those bones—or, I give birth to the song and we all raise it together,” says Jackman with a laugh.

The band was fortunate enough to complete the recording sessions for its second full-length album, *Storms and Prayers*, just before COVID-19 took hold of Canada in March. However, their plans for touring and for creating videos were turned upside down and required some re-jigging. Tom Cochrane, a well-known videographer based on Newfoundland’s west coast, was supposed to fly to Happy Valley-Goose Bay to produce a video for Silver Wolf Band’s version of *Woman of Labrador*. Written in 1979 by Vancouver-based musician Andy Vine, the song was inspired by the memoirs of Elizabeth Goudie, a courageous and resourceful trapper’s wife who published her life’s story in 1973. As Cochrane was unable to travel to Labrador to film the band, they put out a call across Labrador asking for photos and footage of Labradorian women.

“We got a huge response of people sending us videos and photos of their mothers, sisters, and any women of Labrador in their lives,” remembers keyboardist, Matthew Barrett. “Tom also dug up some archival footage, and all those things went into that video. When we put out the call, we were in the middle of this pandemic lockdown and we were all separated, so it really gave us the feeling that everyone in Labrador was working together on this project. The first time I saw it, I just welled up with tears—and we’ve had similar responses from many people.”

The band has been trying to stay in touch with its audience by touring within the Atlantic bubble. Like every other musical group on the planet, they are doing the best they can and are remaining optimistic about the future.

“We are hoping that next summer there will be some festivals and that things go our way,” says Jackman. “We don’t stop. We just released this album but we’re already working on music for another album so, in a year, we should be back in the studio. That’s our plan.”

By Jean Hewson

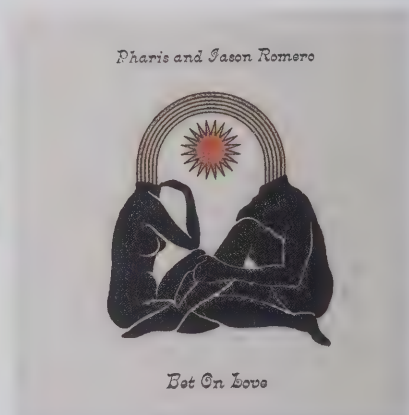


Albums of The Year

And Critics' favourite new discoveries of 2020



Pharis & Jason Romero



Pharis and Jason Romero

Bet On Love

Albums of the Year 2020

1. Pharis & Jason Romero, *Bet on Love* (Lula)
2. Bob Dylan, *Rough and Rowdy Ways* (Columbia)
- Kathleen Edwards, *Total Freedom* (Dualtone)
- William Prince, *Reliever* (Six Shooter)
5. 100 Mile House, *Love And Leave You* (Fallen Tree)
- Shirley Collins, *Heart's Ease* (Domino)
- Scott Cook, *Tangle of Souls* (Independent)
- Eliza Gilkyson, *2020* (Red House)
- Sarah Jarosz, *World On The Ground* (Rounder)
- Lynn Miles, *We'll Look for Stars* (Continental)

Past Albums of the Year

- 2019: The Small Glories, *Assiniboine & The Red* (Red House)
- 2018: Pharis & Jason Romero, *Sweet Old Religion* (Lula)
- 2017: Rhiannon Giddens, *Freedom Highway* (Nonesuch)
- 2016: Ten Strings And A Goat Skin, *Après du Poêle* (Independent)
- 2015: Jayme Stone, *Jayne Stone's Lomax Project* (Borealis)
- 2014: Amelia Curran, *They Promised You Mercy* (Six Shooter)
- 2013: David Francey, *So Say We All*, (Laker Music)
- 2012: Rose Cousins, *We Have Made A Spark* (Outside Music)

- 2011: Gillian Welch, *The Harrow & the Harvest* (Acony)
- 2010: Lynn Miles, *Fall For Beauty* (True North Records)
- 2009: Jory Nash, *New Blue Day* (Independent)
- 2008: Fred Eaglesmith, *Tinderbox* (A Major Label)
- 2007: Alison Krauss & Robert Plant, *Raising Sand* (Rounder)
- 2006: Bob Dylan, *Modern Times* (Columbia)
- 2005: Lynn Miles, *Love Sweet Love* (True North)
- 2004: David Francey, *The Waking Hour* (Laker Music)
- 2003: David Francey, *Skating Rink* (Laker Music)
- 2002: Harry Manx, *Wise And Otherwise* (NorthernBluest)
- 2001: David Francey, *Far End of Summer* (Laker Music)

New Discoveries 2020

1. Phoebe Bridgers
- Jake Blount
3. Cinder Well

Past New Discoveries

- 2019: Talisk, *The Unfaithful Servants*, Lula Wiles
- 2018: Wallis Bird, Annie Sumi
- 2017: Birds of Chicago, William Prince
- 2016: Dori Freeman
- 2015: Anna and Elizabeth



Phoebe Bridgers

Here we are: the 20th and final *Penguin Eggs* critics' annual poll to determine Album of the Year and New Discovery of 2020. Twenty polls that began with David Francey and Harry Manx taking top honours. What ever became of those two fellas, I wonder?

Almost 50 critics comprised of radio hosts, music journalists, folk festival and folk club artistic directors, musicians... provided input for this survey, making it the largest of its kind in the country.

All listed their top 10 national and international recordings released in 2020 and their three favourite new discoveries of the year. Every nomination received one point. Those with the most made our lists.

As in 2018, the runaway top recording this year went to the husband-and-wife duo from Horsefly, BC,—Pharis and Jason Romero—for their wonderful latest release *Bet On Love*. No strangers on these pages, the pair have consistently created an outstanding body of work over the past decade. And clearly, their latest disc is no exception. It certainly put a smile on my face when they eclipsed Bob Dylan's *Rough And Rowdy Ways*—his sterling first recording of original material in eight years.

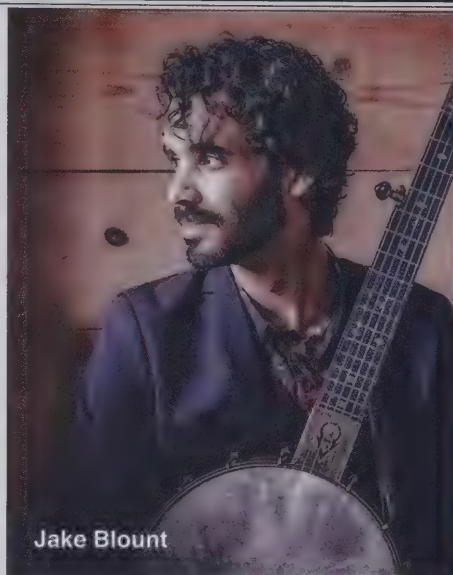
"Pharis and Jason Romero just keep moving to a new level with their melodic blend of old-time, folk, and bluegrass," wrote our Mike Sadava in the autumn issue. "Their voices, tight harmonies, and tasteful instrumental chops have always been impressive over the past decade, and now the songwriting has reached a new level."

As per usual, the New Discovery category turned into a real bun fight with very little to separate the numerous nominated contenders. Understandably, this was a particularly difficult year for this category as a result of no emerging artists touring due to COVID-19. Two names, however, squeaked out on top: Americans Phoebe Bridgers and Jake Blount, on the strength of critically acclaimed recordings *Punisher* and *Spider Tales*, respectively.

A huge thanks to all who kindly participated in this poll.

Now, dear reader, do yourself a favour and check out the judges' selections and then go and discover all this wonderful music for yourself. And if you can, buy directly from the artists to ensure they receive maximum compensation for all their gifted talents.

— Roddy Campbell



Ian A Anderson: Musician, Podwireless producer/presenter: Shirley Collins, *Heart's Ease* (Domino); Groupe Rtd, *The Dancing Devils Of Djibouti* (Ostinato); Intarsia, *Sistere* (Independent); Leveret, *Variations Live* (Independent); Mekons, *Exquisite* (Mekorpse); Ann O'Aro, *Longoz* (Cobalt/Buda); The Rheingans Sisters, *Receiver* (Bendigedig); Salt House, *Huam* (Hudson); Ariel Sharratt & Mathias Kombucha, *Never Work* (BB*Island); Various Artists, *The Harry Smith B-Sides* (Dust-to-Digital)

New Discoveries: Cinder Well, Intarsia, Aragaki Mutsumi

Mike Barker: Artistic director, Folk Under The Clock, Peterborough, ON: Sam Carter, *Home Waters* (Captain Records); Kris Drever, *Where The World Is Thin* (Reveal Records); Bob Dylan, *Rough and Rowdy Ways* (Columbia Records); Roy Forbes, *Edge of Blue* (A.K.A. Records); Sam Lee, *Old Wow* (Cooking Vinyl); Catherine MacLellan, *Coyote* (True North Records); Pharis & Jason Romero, *Bet On Love* (Lula Records); Steel Rail, *Coming Home* (Crossties Music); The Waterboys, *Where The Action Is* (Cooking Vinyl); Jamie Webster, *We Get By* (Assai Records)

New Discoveries: The Breath, Kennedy Road, Jamie Webster

Jackie Bell: Artist, writer, Calgary: Eliza Gilkyson, *2020* (Red House); Kim Harris, *Heirloom* (LHM Records); Adrienne Lenker, *Songs* (4AD); Lauren MacColl, *Landskein* (Make Believe Records); The Once, *Time Enough* (Independent); Tom Phillips & the D.T.S., *Satellites and Stars* (Independent); William Prince, *Reliever* (Six Shooter); Suzzy Roche & Lucy Wainwright Roche, *I Can Still Hear You* (StorySound Records); Bruce Springsteen, *Letter To You* (Columbia); Raye Zaragoza, *Woman In Color* (Rebel River Records)

New Discoveries: Hollow Coves, Madisen, Raye

Zaragoza

Vic Bell: Artistic director, Nickelodeon Music Club, Calgary, AB: 100 Mile House, *Love and Leave You* (Fallen Tree Records); Big Little Lions, *Inside Voice* (AntiFragile.com); Scott Cook, *Tangle of Souls* (Independent); The Dead South, *Sugar & Joy* (Six Shooter Records); The East Pointers, *Yours To Break* (Independent); Roy Forbes, *Edge of Blue* (AKA Records); Mélisande (Électrotrad), *Les Myriades* (Borealis Records); Pharis & Jason Romero, *Bet On Love* (Lula Records); Sultans of String, *Refuge* (Independent); Sussex, *The Ocean Wide* (Outside Music)

New Discoveries: Beauséjour, Le Diable à Cinq, Okan

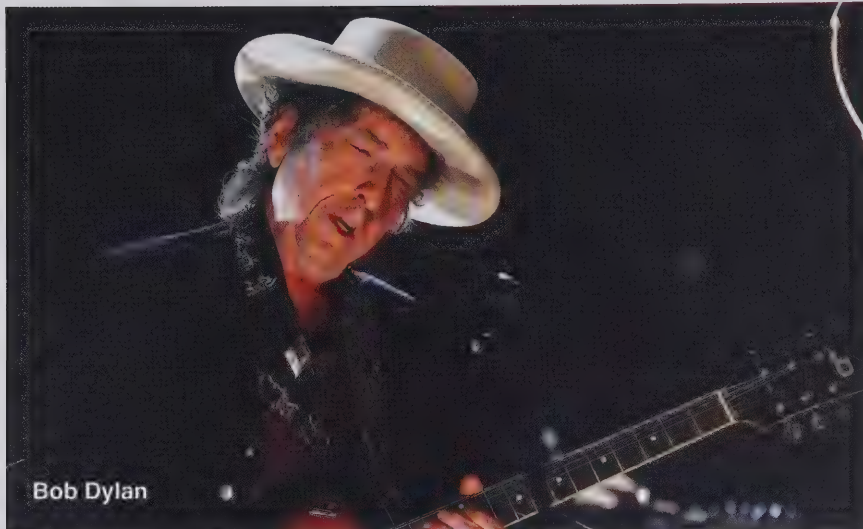
Marc Bolduc: Radio producer/host, *Excusez-la!* (CIBL 101.5 FM): Bon Débarras, *Repères* (Productions de l'onde); Nicolas Boulérice, *Maison de pierres – Confiné aux voyages* (La Cie du Nord); Cécilia, *Accent* (Independent); La Croisée d'antan, *Apocalyptik* (Independent); Duo Beaudry-Prudhomme, *Chansons en noires et blanches* (Independent); La Famille LeBlanc, *Trois jolies demoiselles* (Independent); Magasin général, *En spécial cette semaine* (Independent); Bernard Simard, *La route* (Independent); David Simard, *Dâvi Simard – Violoneux* (Independent); Via pangée, *Via pangée* (Pruche libre)

New Discoveries: Olivier Brousseau/Stéphanie Blanchette, Olivier Demers, Robin Servant

Roddy Campbell: Editor and publisher, *Penguin Eggs*: Che Apalache, *Rearrange My Heart* (Free Dirt Records); Ayla Brook & The Soundmen, *Desolation Sounds* (Fallen Tree Records); Garefowl, *Cliffs* (Penny Fiddle Records); Eliza Gilkyson, *2020* (Red House); Ruth Hazelton, *Daisywheel* (Independent); Paul Kelly, *Songs From The South. Greatest Hits 1985-2019* (Cooking Vinyl); Imar, *Avalanche* (Big Music Records); Dirk Powell, *When I Wait For You* (Vertical); Rube & Rake, *Leaving With Nothing*



Albums of The Year



(Independent); Cinder Well, *No Summer* (Free Dirt Records)

New Discoveries: Garefowl, Ruth Hazelton, Cinder Well

Lark Clark: Host/producer, *World Spinning*, CKUA Radio Network: Artists for Peace & Justice, *Let The Rhythm Lead* (Independent); Fat Freddy's Drop, *Lock-In* (The Drop); Khruangbin, *Mordechai* (Dead Oceans); Natalia Lafourcade, *Un Canto por Mexico, Vol. 1* (Sony); Bab L'Bluz, *Nayda* (Real World); Okan, *Espiral* (Lulaword); Orkesta Mendoza, *Curandero* (Glitterbeat); Rubim de Toledo, *The Dig* (Independent); Songhoy Blues, *Optimisme* (Fat Possum); Spur Pourier, *Shining So Bright* (1237601 Records DK)

New Discoveries: Artists for Peace & Justice, Bab L'Bluz, Spur Pourier

Kerry Clarke: Artistic director, Calgary Folk Music Festival: Basia Bulat, *Are You In Love* (Secret City Records); Elliott Brood, *Keeper* (Six Shooter); Fiona Apple, *Fetch the Bolt Cutters* (Epic); Jennah Barry, *Holiday* (Forward Music

Group); LADAMA, *Oye Mujer* (Six Degrees); Pharis & Jason Romero, *Bet on Love* (Lula); Phoebe Bridgers, *Punisher* (Dead Oceans); The War and Treaty, *Hearts Town* (Rouder Records); Tom Phillips & the D.T.s, *Satellites and Stars* (Independent); William Prince, *Reliever* (Six Shooter Records)

New Discoveries: Pantayo, *Sons of Kemet*, Zara McFarlane.

Tanya Corbin: Freelance writer: Bonny Light Horseman, *Bonny Light Horseman* (37d03d); Rose Cousins, *Bravado* (Outside Music); Della Mae, *Headlight* (Rouder Records); Kathleen Edwards, *Total Freedom* (Dualtone Music Group); Jason Isbell & the 400 Unit, *Reunions* (Southeastern Records); Sarah Jarosz, *World on the Ground* (Rouder); Laura Marling, *Song for Our Daughter* (Chrysalis Records); Lori McKenna, *The Balladeer* (CN Records); William Prince, *Gospel First Nation* (Sixshooter Records); Waxahatchee, *Saint Cloud* (Merge Records)

New Discoveries: Kyshona Armstrong, Emma Langford, Waxahatchee

Paul Corby: Host, *Corby's Orbit*, Radio Regent and Blues & Roots Radio; writer, *Roots Music Canada*: 100 Mile House, *Love And Leave You* (Fallen Tree Records); Clara Engel, *Hatching Under The Stars* (Independent); Rick Fines, *Solar Powered Too* (Independent); Braden Gates, *Kitchen Days* (Borealis); Rebecca Hennessy, *All The Little Things You Do* (Independent); Lynn Miles, *We'll Look For Stars* (Continental Song City); Al Qahwa, *African Routes* (Independent); The Smoke Wagon Blues Band, *The Ballad Of Albert Johnson* (Independent); Emilyn Stam & John David Williams, *Honeywood* (Independent); Truths & Rights, *Time For Us To Unite 1981* (Independent)

New Discoveries: Sherman Downey, Matchedash Parish, Vivienne Wilder

Tom Coxworth: Host/producer, *Folk Routes*, CKUA Radio Network: 100 Mile House, *Love and Leave You* (Fallen Tree Records); Emily Barker, *A Dark Murmuration of Words* (Thirty Tigers); Scott Cook, *Tangle of Souls* (Independent); Bob Dylan, *Rough and Rowdy Ways* (Sony Music); Sarah Harmer, *Are You Gone* (Arts & Craft); Connie Kaldor, *Everyday Moments* (Independent); Brennen Leigh, *Prairie Love Letter* (Independent); Karine Polwart, *Scottish Songbook* (Hegri Music); Kate Rusby, *Hand Me Down* (Pure); Shaye Zadravec, *Windfall* (Indelible Music)

New Discoveries: Jake Blount, Emma Langford, Crys Matthews

Gary Cristall: Veteran of the folk wars, folk music historian: David Bromberg, *Big Road* (Red House); Hayes Carll, *Alone Together Sessions* (Dualtone Records); Diego El Cigala, *Cigala Canta a Mexico* (Sony Music Latin); Roy Forbes, *Edge of Blue* (A.K.A.); Veda Hille, *Little Volcano* (Hilleotron Classics); Makaya McCraven & Gil Scott-Heron, *Gil Scott-Heron – We're New*



KATHLEEN EDWARDS



Albums of The Year

Again: A Reimagining by Makaya McCraven (XL Recordings); McKaya McCraven, *Universal Beings E&F Sides* (International Anthem Recording Co.); Daniele Sepe, *Le nuove avventure di Capitano Capitone* (Goodfellas); Sian, *Sian* (Independent); Emma Swift, *Blonde on the Tracks* (Tiny Ghost Records)

New Discoveries: Makaya McCraven, Sian, Emma Swift

Ian Davies: Artistic director, Cuckoo's Nest Folk Club, London, ON: Bonny Light Horseman, *Bonny Light Horseman* (37D03D Records); David Bradstreet, *Best Foot Forward* (Street Records); Matthew Byrne & Lady Cove Women's Choir, *In Concert* (Independent); John Doyle, *The Path of Stories* (Compass); Sam Lee, *Old Wow* (Cooking Vinyl); Leveret, *Variations Live* (Independent); Pitmen Poets, *Seamless* (Independent); William Prince, *Reliever* (Glassnote Records); Aoife Scott, *Homebird* (Wendy Pops Records); Ken Whiteley, *Calm In the Eye of the Storm* (Borealis)

New Discoveries: M'ANAM, The Pairs, Sian

Steve Edge: Artistic director, Rogue Folk Club, Vancouver, BC, host at CITR FM 101.9 Vancouver: Blackie & The Rodeo Kings, *King Of This Town* (Divine Industries/WEA); Shirley Collins, *Heart's Ease* (Domino); Dreamers' Circus, *Blue White Gold* (Independent); Beppe Gambetta, *Dove Tia O Vento* (Borealis); Eliza Gilkyson, *2020* (Red House); Hauler, *Hauler* (Independent); Sarah Jarosz, *World On The Ground* (Rounder Records); Pharis & Jason Romero, *Bet On Love* (Lula Records); Shooglenifty, *Acid Croft Vol. 9* (Shooglenifty Records); Molly Tuttle, *But I'd Rather Be With You* (Compass Records)

New Discoveries: Jake Blount, Michael Doucet avec Lacher Prise, Crystal Shawanda

Doug Gallant: Music journalist, *The Guardian*, Charlottetown: Mary Chapin Carpenter, *The Dirt and the Stars* (Lambent Light Records); Shirley Collins, *Heart's Ease* (Domino Records); Kris Delmhörst, *Long Day in the Milky Way* (Big Mean Music); Kris Drever, *Where The World Is Thin* (Reveal Records); Kathleen Edwards, *Total Freedom* (Dualtone Records); Gordon Lightfoot, *Solo* (Warner Music Canada); Suzzie Roche & Lucy Wainwright Roche, *I Can Still Hear You* (StorySound Records); Kate Rusby, *Hand Me Down* (Pure Records); Martin Simpson, *Home Recordings* (Topic Records); Gillian Welch, *Boots No. 2: The Lost Songs, Vol. 2* (Acony)

New Discoveries: Phoebe Bridgers, Squirrel Flower, Sam Lee

Cara Gibney: Freelance writer living in Northern Ireland: Sharhabil Ahmed, *The King Of Sudanese Jazz* (Habibi Funk); Sam Amidon, *Sam Amidon* (Nonesuch Records); Kris Drever, *Where The World Is Thin* (Reveal Records); Seamus Egan, *Early Bright* (THL); Lowest Pair, *The Perfect Plan* (Delicata Records); Bróna McVittie, *The Man in the Mountain* (Company of Corkbots); Orkesta Mendoza, *Curandero* (Glitterbeat Records); Brigid Mae Power, *Head Above the Water* (Fire Records); Nadia Reid, *Out Of My Province* (Spacebomb); Skipper's Alley, *The Owl Fip* (Independent)

New Discoveries: Sharhabil Ahmed, Erland Cooper, Sam Reider & The Human Hands

Levi Gogerla: Music/arts reporter, *Penguin Eggs* contributor: Phoebe Bridgers, *Punisher* (Dead Oceans); Bill Callahan, *Gold Record* (Drag City); Elvis Depressedly, *Depressedelica* (Run for Cover Records); Braden Gates, *Kitchen Days* (Borealis Records); Adrienne Lenker, *Songs* (4AD Records); The Mountain Goats, *Getting Into Knives* (Merge Records); Sturgill Simpson, *Cuttin' Grass – Vol. 1* [Butcher Shoppe



Kathleen Edwards

Sessions] (High Top Mountain); Three Queens in Mourning/Bonnie (Prince) Billy, *Hello Sorrow, Hello Joy* (Textile Records); Colter Wall, *Western Swing & Waltzes and Other Punchy Songs* (La Honda); Waxahatchee, *Saint Cloud* (Merge Records)

New Discoveries: Elvis Depressedly, Lydia Loveless, Katie Pruitt

Jan Hall: Host of *Folk Roots Radio*: 100 Mile House, *Love And Leave You* (Fallen Tree Records); Scott Cook, *A Tangle Of Souls* (Independent); Kathleen Edwards, *Total Freedom* (Dualtone); Rick Fines, *Solar Powered Too* (Independent); Lynn Hanson, *Just Words* (Independent); Jayme Stone, *AWake* (Independent); Julian Taylor, *The Ridge* (Independent); Sultans of String, *Refuge* (Independent); Ken Whiteley, *Calm In The Eye Of The Storm* (Borealis Records); Ken Yates, *Quiet Talkers* (Independent)

New Discoveries: Don Bray, Aylie Sparkes, Shaye Zadravec



Albums of The Year



Philip Harries: Contributor, *Penguin Eggs*: Jill Barber, *Entre Nous* (Outside); Elliott Brood, *Keeper* (Six Shooter); Calan, *Kistvaen* (Recordiau Sienco); Bill Callahan, *Gold Record* (Drag City); Gord Downie, *Away Is Mine* (Arts & Crafts); Wu Fei & Abigail Washburn, *Wu Fei & Abigail Washburn* (Smithsonian Folkways); Eliza Gilkyson, *2020* (Red House); Laura Marling, *Song for Our Daughter* (Chrysalis-Partisan); Brian McNeill, *No Silence* (Greentrax); William Prince, *Reliever* (Six Shooter)

New Discoveries: Bonny Light Horseman, Phoebe Bridgers, Chatham Rabbits

Glen Herbert: Writer/editor, Burlington, ON: Hayes Carll, *Alone Together Sessions* (Dualtone Music); Sarah Jarosz, *World On The Ground* (Rounder Records); Yo-Yo Ma, Stuart Duncan,

Edgar Meyer, & Chris Thile, *Not Our First Goat Rodeo* (Sony Classical Music); Pharis & Jason Romero, *Bet On Love* (Lula Records); Chris Smither, *More from the Levee* (Signature Sounds); The Special Consensus, *Chicago Barn Dance* (Compass Records); Steel Rail, *Coming Home* (Independent); Molly Tuttle, ... *but i'd rather be with you* (Compass Records); Jordan Tice, *Motivational Speakeasy* (Padiddle Records); Twisted Pine, *Right Now* (Signature Sounds Recordings)

New Discoveries: Jake Blount, Corn Nut Creek, Erynn Marshall & Carl Jones

Ken Hunt: Europe-based music historian: Katy Carr, *Providence* (Deluce Recordings); Shirley Collins, *Heart's Ease* (Domino); Grateful Dead, *Workingman's Dead (50th Anniversary Deluxe Edition)* (Warner/Rhino); Faith Hield, *Wrackline* (Topic Records); Peter Knight's Gigspanner: Big Band, *Natural Invention* (Independent); Kronos Quartet, *Long Time Passing: Kronos Quartet & Friends Celebrate Pete Seeger* (Smithsonian Folkways); Thomas McCarthy, *Comfort* (Independent); Joni Mitchell, *Joni Mitchell Archives – Vol. 1: The Early Years (1963–1967)* (Rhino); Martin Simpson, *Home Recordings* (Topic Records); Richard & Linda Thompson, *Hard Luck Stories (1972–1982)* (Universal)

New Discoveries: Martin's Carthy's archival recordings, Katherine Priddy, Trolska Polska

Colin Irwin: U.K.-based music journalist, author; *Penguin Eggs* contributor: John & James Carty, *The Wavy Bow Collection* (Racket); Shirley Collins, *Heart's Ease* (Domino); Kris Drever, *Where The World Is Thin* (Reveal); Bob Dylan, *Rough and Rowdy Ways* (Columbia); Diana Jones, *Song To A Refugee* (Proper); The Mammals, *Nonet* (Humble Abode); Peter Knight's Gigspanner Big Band, *Natural Invention* (Gigspanner); Ma Polaine's Great Decline, *City Of*

Love (OMH); Suzzy Roche & Lucy Wainwright Roche, *I Can Still Hear You* (Storysound); Martin Simpson, *Home Recordings* (Topic)

New Discoveries: Lunatraktors, Ma Polaine's Great Decline, Norrie MacIver

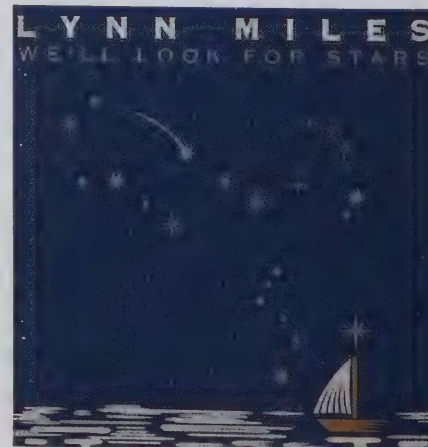
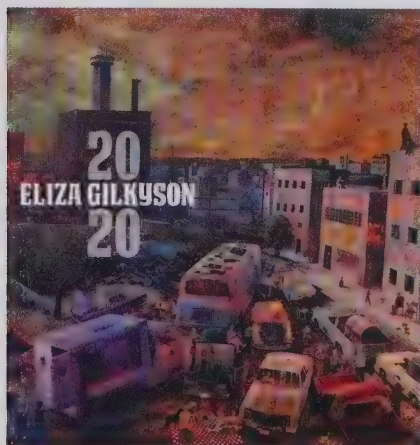
Heather Kitching: Managing editor, *Roots Music Canada*: Angel Baribeau, *For Those I Love(d)* (Independent); Lynne Hanson, *Just Words* (Independent); Juurini, *Saimanirnut* (Atty); Mike McKenna Jr., *At the Edge of the World* (Independent); Lynn Miles, *We'll Look for Stars* (Continental Record Services); William Prince, *Reliever* (Six Shooter); Pharis & Jason Romero, *Bet On Love* (Lula Records); Sultans of String, *Refuge* (Independent); Julian Taylor, *The Ridge* (Independent); Twin Flames, *Omen* (Independent)

New Discoveries: Angel Baribeau, Gisun, Juurini

Patrick Langston: Freelance arts writer, artsfile.ca, *Penguin Eggs*: Bob Dylan, *Rough and Rowdy Ways* (Columbia); Eliza Gilkyson, *2020* (Red House); Fleet Foxes, *Shore* (Anti-), Laura Marling, *Song for Our Daughter* (Chrysalis-Partisan); Lynn Miles, *We'll Look for Stars* (Continental Record Services); Owen Pallett, *Island* (Independent); Pharis & Jason Romero, *Bet On Love* (Lula Records); Phoebe Bridgers, *Punisher* (Dead Ocean); Shirley Collins, *Heart's Ease* (Domino Recording Company); Steel Rail, *Coming Home* (Crossties Music)

New Discoveries: Hayes Carll, Laura Marling, Phoebe Bridgers

Roger Levesque: Writer, *Edmonton Journal*, *Penguin Eggs*, etc: 100 Mile House, *Love And Leave You* (Fallen Tree); Al Qahwa, *African Routes* (Independent); Braden Gates, *Kitchen Days* (Borealis); Kronos Quartet, *Long Time Passing* (Smithsonian Folkways); Lakou Mizik,



Albums of The Year

HaitiaNola (Cumbancha); Joni Mitchell, *Archives – Vol. 1, The Early Years* (Rhino/Warner); Maceo Parker, *Soul Food: Cooking With Maceo* (Funk Garage); Pharis & Jason Romero, *Bet On Love* (Lula); Songhoy Blues, *Optimisme* (Fat Possum); Kenny (Blues Boss) Wayne, *Go, Just Do It!* (Stony Plain)

New Discoveries: Jeremy Dutcher, Angelique Francis, nêhiyawak

Rhea March: Consultant/educator/host, *It Takes A Village*, CJSR Radio, Edmonton: 100 Mile House, *Love and Leave You* (Fallen Tree Records); Ayla Brook & The Soundmen, *Desolation Sounds* (Fallen Tree Records); Scott Cook, *Tangle of Souls* (Independent); Braden Gates, *Kitchen Days* (Borealis); John Hewitt & The New Americans, *American Hotel* (Independent); Joe Nolan, *Drifters* (Fallen Tree Records); William Prince, *Reliever* (Independent); Scenic Route to Alaska, *Time For Yourself* (Independent); Andy Shauf, *The Neon Skyline* (Arts & Crafts); Small Glories, *Assiniboine & the Red* (Red Hen Records)

New Discoveries: John Hewitt & The New Americans, Logan & Nathan, Emmet Michael

Jim Marino: Host, *Freewheeling Folk Show*, *Freewheeling Spotlight Show*, 93.3 CFMU (cfmu.ca) Hamilton, ON: Blackie & the Rodeo Kings, *King of This Town* (Warner Music); David Bradstreet, *Best Foot Forward* (Independent); Scott Cook, *Tangle of Souls* (Independent); Ken Dunn, *Ashes in the Morning* (Trespass); Kathleen Edwards, *Total Freedom* (Dualtone); Rick Fines, *Solar Powered Too* (RAF); Lynne Hanson, *Just Words* (Independent); Lynn Miles, *We'll Look For Stars* (Continental Record Services); Julian Taylor, *The Ridge* (Howling Turtle); Steel Rail, *Coming Home* (Crossties Music)

New Discoveries: Elliot Brood, Hauler, Heather Valley



100 Mile House

Bruce Mason: Gulf Island-based freelance writer: David Bromberg Band, *Big Road* (Red House Records); The Chicks, *Gaslighter* (Sony); Bob Dylan, *Rough and Rowdy Ways* (Columbia); Goat Rodeo, *Not Our First Goat Rodeo* (Sound Postings); Kathleen Edwards, *Total Freedom* (Dualtone); Kronos Quartet, *Long Time Passing: Kronos and Friends Celebrate Pete Seeger* (Smithsonian Folkways); William Prince, *Reliever* (Glassnote); Pharis & Jason Romero, *Bet On Love* (Lula); Molly Tuttle, *...but I'd rather be with you* (Compass); Lucinda Williams, *Good Souls Better Angels* (Highway 20/Thirty Tigers)

New Discoveries: Becky Buller Band, Lee Harvey Osmond, William Prince

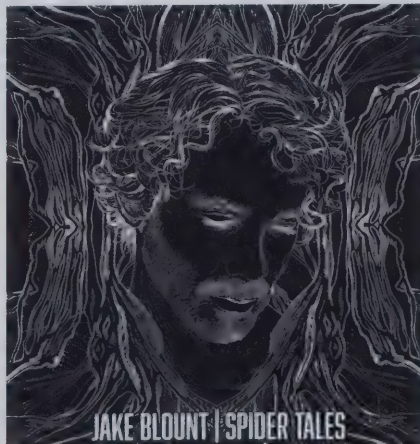
David McPherson: Author, freelance journalist: Drive-By Truckers, *The Unraveling* (ATO); Kathleen Edwards, *Total Freedom* (Dualtone); Sarah Harmer, *Are You Gone* (Arts & Crafts); Jason Isbell & the 400 Unit, *Reunions* (Southeastern Records); William Prince, *Reliever* (Six Shooter); Nathaniel Rateliff, *And It's Still Alright*

(Stax); Julian Taylor, *The Ridge* (Independent); Gillian Welch, *Boots No. 2: The Lost Songs, Vol. 1* (Acony); Lucinda Williams, *Good Souls Better Angels* (Highway 20 Records/Thirty Tigers); Neil Young, *Homegrown* (Reprise)

New Discoveries: Phoebe Bridgers, Noah Reid, Waxahatchee

Tony Montague: Music writer, arts journalist, *Penguin Eggs* contributor: Shirley Collins, *Heart's Ease* (Domino Recording Company); Rockin' Dopsie Jr & The Zydeco Twisters, *Rockin' Zydeco* (Southern Roots Records); Michael Doucet, *Lâcher Prise* (Compass Records); John Doyle, *The Path of Stones* (Compass); Dreamers Circus, *Blue White Gold* (Vertical Records); Bob Dylan, *Rough and Rowdy Ways* (Columbia); Jez Lowe, *Crazy Pagan* (Tantobie Records); Crystal Shawanda, *Church House Blues* (True North Records); Shooogenifty, *Acid Croft Vol. 9* (Shoogle Records); Martin Simpson, *Home Recordings* (Topic Records)

New Discoveries: Été, Muddy Gurdy, Crystal Shawanda



Albums of The Year



Tom Murray: Freelance writer, *Edmonton Journal*, *Penguin Eggs*: Bonnie (Prince) Billy, *I Made A Place* (Drag City); Jake Blount, *Spider Tales* (Free Dirt Records); Rose Cousins, *Bravado* (Outside Music); Alula Down, *Postcards from Godley Moor, Summer 2020* (Independent); Joni Mitchell, *Archives, Vol. 1: The Early Years 1963-1967* (Rhino); Orville Peck, *Show Pony* (Sub Pop); Margo Price, *That's How Rumors Get Started* (Loma Vista Recordings); Little Sparta, *Lost Boat Party* (Grey Gallery Records); Molly Tuttle, *...but I'd rather be with you* (Compass); Gillian Welch, *Boots No 2: The Lost Songs, Vol. 3* (Acony)

New Discoveries: Jake Blount, Kimberley MacGregor, Tartit

Rob Oakie: Executive director, Music PEIT: Bob Dylan, *Rough and Rowdy Ways* (Columbia Records); Dennis Ellsworth, *Common Senseless EP* (Pyramid Scheme Records); Mark Haines, *Up By The Roots* (Independent); Hawktaill, *Formations* (Paddle Records); Inn Echo, *Winter's End* (1180163 Records DK); Sarah Jarosz, *World on the Ground* (Rounder Records); Lawrence Maxwell, *Almost Natural* (Independent); Dylan Menzie, *Lost In Dreams* (Independent); Shane Pendergast, *Place To The Name* (Corran Bran Music); Molly Tuttle, *...but I'd rather be with you* (Compass Records)

New Discoveries: Hawktaill, Jacob Joliff, Magpies

j. poet: Freelance writer: Helen America, *Red Sun* (Strawberry Ghost); Marcia Ball, *Shine Bright* (Alligator); David Bromberg, *Big Road* (Red House); Quinn DeVeaux, *Book of Soul* (QDV); The Dillards, *Old Road New Again* (Pinecastle); Eliza Gilkyson, *2020* (Red House);

John McCutcheon, *Cabin Fever* (Appalsongs); Los Mocosos, *All Grown Up* (Hip Spanic); Steep Canyon Rangers, *Arm In Arm* (Yep Roc); Colter Wall, *Western Swing & Waltzes and Other Punchy Songs* (La Honda/Thirty Tigers)

New Discoveries: Helen America, Quinn DeVeaux, Colter Wall

John Prentice: Host/producer, *Planet Mainstage* (101.5 UFM, umfm.com); Bill Bourne, *A Love Fandango* (Twelve Point Records); Samantha Crain, *A Small Death* (Ramseur Records); Eliza Gilkyson, *2020* (Red House Records); Martyn Joseph, *When We Get Through This* (Pipe Records); John McCutcheon, *Cabin Fever: Songs from the Quarantine* (Appalsongs); Lynn Miles, *We'll Look for Stars* (Continental Record Services); Ondara, *Folk'n'Roll Vol.1: Tales of Isolation* (Verve Forecast); William Prince, *Reliever* (Six Shooter Records); Pharis & Jason Romero, *Bet On Love* (Lula Records); Richard Thompson, *Bloody Noses* (Beeswing)

New Discoveries: Afel Bocoum, Sabin Jacques & Rachel Aucoin, Ladama

Tim Readman: Musician/singer/songwriter/producer: Brighde Chaimbeul, *The Reeling* (River Lea Recordings); Cinder Well, *No Summer* (Free Dirt); John Doyle, *The Path of Stones* (Compass); Gatehouse Heather, *Down the Moor* (Gael Linn); Hawktaill, *Formations* (Paddle Records); The Hen Wives Tales, *The Sisters of Elva Hill* (Betty Beetroot Records); Benji Kirkpatrick & The Excess, *Gold Has Worn Away* (Westpark Music); Jez Lowe, *Crazy Pagan* (Tantobie Records); John McLaughlin, Shankar Mahadevan, Zakir Hussain, *Is That So?* (Abstract Logix); Jack Rutter, *Gold of Scar and Shale* (Independent).

New Discoveries: Brighde Chaimbeul, Cinder Well, Benji Kirkpatrick & The Excess

Mike Regenstreif: Journalist, CKCU folk radio host, blogger (frrb.blogspot.com); Eliza Gilkyson, *2020* (Red House); Kronos Quartet, *Long Time Passing: Kronos Quartet & Friends Celebrate Pete Seeger* (Smithsonian Folkways); Leyla McCalla, *Varied Colored Songs: A Tribute to Langston Hughes* (Smithsonian Folkways); John McCutcheon, *Cabin Fever: Songs from the Quarantine* (Appalsongs); Lynn Miles, *We'll Look for Stars* (Continental Record Services); Gretchen Peters, *The Night You Wrote That Song: The Songs of Mickey Newbury* (Scarlet Letter); Orit Shimoni, *Strange and Beautiful Things* (Independent); Steel Rail, *Coming Home* (Crossies); VickiKristinaBarcelona, *Pawn Shop Radio* (StorySound); Samoa Wilson with the Jim

Kweskin Band, *I Just Want To Be Horizontal* (Kingswood)

New Discoveries: Mandy Marylane, Jenny Reynolds, Emma Swift

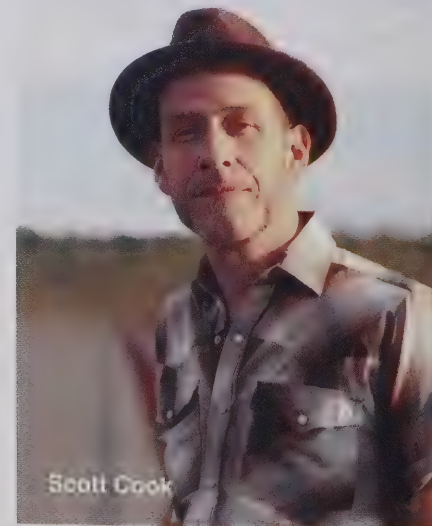
Jeff Robson: Host, *Tell the Band to Go Home*, CJUM 101.5 UFM, Winnipeg, MN; Sean Burns, *It Takes Luck To Get the Best of Me* (Independent); Thomas Csorba, *Thomas Csorba* (Independent); Ben de la Cour, *Shadow Land* (Flour Sack Cape); Kathleen Edwards, *Total Freedom* (Dualtone); Kennedy Road, *A Little Fight Left* (Independent); Joe Nolan, *Drifters* (Fallen Tree); Melissa Payne, *Darker Than Your Dark* (7th Fire); Katie Pruitt, *Expectations* (Rounder); Slow Leaves, *Shelf Life* (Birthday Cake Media); Ken Yates, *Quiet Talkers* (Independent)

New Discoveries: Thomas Csorba, Kennedy Road, Katie Pruitt.

Mike Sadava: Freelance writer: Scott Cook, *Tangle of Souls* (Independent); Bob Dylan, *Rough and Rowdy Ways* (Columbia); Rick Fines, *Solar Powered Too* (Independent); Sarah Jarosz, *World on the Ground* (Rounder Records); Pharis & Jason Romero, *Bet On Love* (Lula Records); Kate Rusby, *Philosophers, Poets and Kings* (Pure Records); Sarah Jane Scouten, *Confessions* (Light Organ Records); Bruce Springsteen, *Letter To You* (Columbia); Billy Strings, *Home* (Rounder Records); Molly Tuttle, *...but I'd rather be with you* (Compass Records)

New Discoveries: Bill Callahan, Isaac Eischer, Lynne Harrison

Jason Schneider: Toronto-based journalist and publicist: 100 Mile House, *Love And Leave You* (Fallen Tree); Leah Barley, *Bring Out Your Dead*



Albums of The Year



Eliza Gilkyson

(Independent); John Borra, *Blue Wine* (Cousin Jeb); Ayla Brook & The Sound Men, *Desolation Sounds* (Fallen Tree); Mallory Chipman & The Mystics, *Aquarian* (Independent); Drive-By Truckers, *The Unraveling* (ATO); The Jayhawks, *XOXO* (Sham); Mike Plume, *Lonesome Stretch Of Highway* (Royalty); Whitney Rose, *We Still Go To Rodeos* (MCG); Sturgill Simpson, *Cuttin' Grass Vol. 1* (High Top Mountain)

New Discoveries: The Allman Betts Band, Logan & Nathan, Adia Victoria

Iles siemieniuk: *Penguin Eggs* contributor, broadcaster: Rose Cousins, *Bravado* (Old Farm Pony); Bob Dylan, *Rough and Rowdy Ways* (Columbia); Kathleen Edwards, *Total Freedom* (Dualtone Records); Elliott Brood, *Keeper* (Six-shooter); Hauler, *Hauler* (Independent); Sierra Hull, *25 Trips* (Rounder); Sarah Jarosz, *World On the Ground* (Rounder); The Jerry Cans, *Echoes* (Aakuluk Music); Pharis & Jason Romero, *Bet On Love* (Lula Records); Bruce Springsteen, *Letter To You* (Columbia)

New Discoveries: Bebe Buckskin, Hauler, Raye Zaragoza

Lyle Skinner: Host, *Prairie Ceilidh*, CKJS Radio 810, and *Waxies Dargle*, CJUM/UMFM 101.5, Winnipeg, MB; Alan Doyle, *Rough Side Out* (Skinner's Hill Music); John Doyle, *The Path Of Stones* (Compass Records); Órla Fallon, *Lore* (Green Hill Productions); Fay Hield, *Wrackline* (Topic Records); Éilís Kennedy, *So Ends The Day* (Independent); Siobhan Miller, *All Is Not Forgotten* (Songprint Recordings); Kate Rusby, *Hand Me Down* (Pure Records); Salt House, *Huam* (Hudson Records); Aoife Scott, *Homebird* (Independent); Jenny Sturgeon, *The Living Mountain* (Hudson Records)

New Discoveries: Emily Barker, Lauren MacColl, Kirsty Merryn

Brenda Tacik: Host, *Deeper Well*, CJTR, Regina Community Radio; Jud Caswell, *Live At the Seagull Shop* (Independent); Scott Cook, *Tangle of Souls* (Groove Revival); Vance Gilbert, *Good Good Man* (Disismye Music); Jay & Jo, *Victory* (Independent); Jez Lowe, *Crazy Pagan* (Tantobie Records); Lynn Miles, *We'll Look for Stars* (Continental Record Services); Possessed by Paul James, *As We Go Wandering* (PPJ Records); Pharis & Jason Romero, *Bet On Love* (Lula Records); Rube & Rake, *Leaving With Nothing* (LHM Records); Steel Rail, *Coming Home* (Crossties Music)

New Discoveries: Donal Hinely, Anna Lynch, Bella White

Eric Thom: Music writer, Toronto: Elvin Bishop & Charlie Musselwhite, *100 Years Of Blues* (Alligator); Rory Block, *Prove It On Me: Power Women of the Blues, Vol. 2* (Stony Plain); Phoebe Bridgers, *Punisher* (Dead Oceans); David Bromberg Band, *Big Road* (Red House); Michael Chapman, *True North* (Outside Music); John Doyle, *The Path Of Stones* (Compass); Ronnie Earl & The Broadcasters, *Rise Up* (Stony Plain); Tinsley Ellis, *Ice Cream In Hell* (Alligator Records); Wayne Nicholson & John Campbelljohn, *Elmore's Blues* (Grindstone Records); Wide Mouth Mason, *I Wanna Go With You* (Independent)

New Discoveries: The Barrett Anderson Band.



Sarah Jarosz



Lynn Miles

Steve Conn, Songhoy Blues

Greg Torrington: Programming Manager/Curator, Roots and Country channels (Canada & U.S.), Stingray Music; Carolina Story, *Dandelion* (Black River); Courtney Marie Andrews, *Old Flowers* (Fat Possum); Rose Cousins, *Bravado* (Outside Music); Kathleen Edwards, *Total Freedom* (Dualtone); Sarah Jarosz, *World On the Ground* (Rounder/Concord); Della Mae, *Headlight* (Rounder/Concord); Lori McKenna, *The Balladeer* (Thirty Tigers); Corin Raymond, *Dirty Mansions* (Independent); Pharis & Jason Romero, *Bet On Love* (Lula); Darrell Scott, *Sings The Blues of Hank Williams* (Soundly Music)

New Discoveries: Bad Luck Woman & Her Misfortunes, Rachel Garlin, Kristen Grainger & True North

Michael "A Man Called" Wrycraft is a Juno Award-winning Album Designer: Aerialists, *Dear Sienna*, (Independent); Al Qahwa, *African Routes*, (Independent); Dave Clarke, *The Healing Garden*, (Independent); Eaoth Argos, *Veil*, (Edam Squid Records); The Henrys, *Paydirt*, (Independent); Niz Wiz, *Niz Wiz*, (El Mocambo Records); Peach & Quiet, *Just Beyond The Shine*, (Independent); Sarah Jane Scouten, *Confessions*, (Independent); Steafan & Saskia, *Moorchild*, (Independent).

New Discoveries: Niz Wiz, Sarah Jane Scouten, Kalyna Rakel.

Honorable mentions also go to: Steel Rail, *Coming Home* (Crossties Music); Molly Tuttle, *...but i'd rather be with you* (Compass Records);



Elvis Costello

His sharply aggressive songs of unusual articulacy still span sundry styles and genres.

By Colin Irwin

Elvis Costello was on the road in England in March when the world came to a juddering halt. “On the last week of that tour I went to a football match at Anfield in Liverpool on the Wednesday with 55,000 people, 3,000 of who had come from Madrid. How sensible does that seem now? The next night in Manchester I started to see the holes appearing in an apparently sold-out crowd and people stayed away because they were nervous.

“On the Friday we played the Hammer-smith Odeon and most of my own guests rang to excuse themselves. They all said they didn’t feel right about coming to a crowded theatre. We had a great show nonetheless, but I didn’t feel right about what I was asking my crew and my band, never mind the fact that people who had paid for tickets, were putting themselves in harm’s way to see me. So the next thing I know, I’m on a plane back to Vancouver and quarantine.”

He spent the next few months living in a cabin on Vancouver Island with his wife, the singer Diana Krall, and their two sons, while maintaining remote contact with his

93-year-old mother on The Wirral, Merseyside, as he watched the pandemic spread.

But you can’t keep a good man down for long...and the lockdown spurred Elvis into a furious burst of activity.

“Well, you can either go to bed and pull the blankets over your head until it’s over or you do something. I had a couple of friends who didn’t make it. Some of them had come through some troubling times only for this to get them. It’s hard.

“So, rather than dwell there too long, you want to do something that indicates a sign of life and I got to work listening to the music I’d recorded prior to that tour.” This involved recordings he’d made in Finland.

“It’s not much of a detour to fly to Helsinki from London but sitting here now it feels like I took a trip to planet Jupiter. I just wanted to wipe the slate clean completely and have nobody with me who knew me or what I was up to. To have no rules and just try to make a rock’n’roll record with the bits and pieces I had in my hand. I had the verses, I had my electric guitar, I had an old drum machine, and I had a young engineer with a completely open mind.”

Those three hugely productive days in Helsinki, along with a similarly random couple of days recording in Paris, came to form the backbone of his latest album, *Hey Clockface*, a record of widely disparate styles that reflect his ongoing desire to consistently reinvent himself and shift musical styles. Here, after all, is someone who initially emerged in the angry halcyon

days of the punk era with sharply aggressive songs of unusual articulacy, but soon went headlong in new, apparently unrelated directions...there was the full-on country album of (mostly) covers, *Almost Blue*, and since then he’s engaged in opera and classical music, dived into ballads, folk music, jazz, and R&B, collaborated with everyone from Paul McCartney to Burt Bacharach and Allen Toussaint, performed shows in every style imaginable—big bands, rock outfits, solo, orchestras—and appeared as himself on *Sesame Street* and *Frasier*. His whole career seems an object lesson in fearlessness, but he rails at the suggestion...

“I’m not fearless, I’m stubborn and bloody-minded. It’s nothing to do with courage—you can’t credit yourself with courage over something like songs. It’s just what I want to do. I’m curious to get into that next room, to have that next experience, and all these things opened up for me. I never could have imagined all the people that I’ve got to meet and work with and become friends with. It boggles my mind. For someone who never went to college I’ve had a very incidental, continuous education from all this.”

Hey Clockface perhaps serves as a microcosm of this eventful journey. Fats Waller’s *How Can You Face Me* is quoted in the title track, which mirrors an era of jazz that his father, Ross McManus, would have been very familiar with, from his days singing and playing trumpet with big bands such as the Joe Loss Orchestra.

"He wouldn't have played Fats Waller, though, my dad—in fact, he would get into fist fights with people who were playing more traditional styles of jazz when he was a bebop player in Birkenhead. He was a modernist. It was like the contemporary v. traditional conflict in folk music when you'd be shown the door if you attempted to sing your own songs. I went through that when I started out in the early 1970s.

"The same was true in the late '40s when my dad came out of the RAF and was playing the trumpet. One minute he wanted to play like Louis Armstrong and then he heard these records coming out of America by Dizzy Gillespie and wanted to play like that, though there's next to nobody in his little town trying to play that way. Just him and his five mates. My father and mother both knew lots of music. They talked about Louis Armstrong a lot."

Costello's early new wave success was launched on the notorious Stiff label ("if it ain't stiff it ain't worth a fuck") aboard a bold no-interviews mantra designed to intensify the intrigue and mystery of a rebellious anti-hero, a ploy that gathered weight when, in an attempt to get his records released in the U.S., he was arrested in 1977 for busking outside the London Hilton while a CBS convention was taking place inside. It worked, too. He was fined £5, but was granted an audition and signed to the CBS Columbia label a few months later.

The no-interview gambit also worked a treat—though, for someone who refused to engage the press back then, he certainly makes up for it now, chattering away like a man possessed about his life, work, and inspirations. He bears none of the debilitating industry bruises or jaundiced weariness of so many of his contemporaries, retaining a wide-eyed enthusiasm about the music and all the opportunities it has brought him.

Like working with the great horn player Chet Baker—"the prince of cool"—who played on one of his greatest tracks, the galling Falklands War protest song *Ship-building*. He'd previously tried to involve Wynton Marsalis in the project, but never quite built the courage to ask him directly.

"We were both young and defensive and it's like when you are too afraid to say what you really want and I just couldn't express clearly what I wanted, so it never happened.

Then the very next week I saw an advert for Chet Baker, who was playing four nights at a club—apparently he'd been on tour with Stan Getz and they'd had a falling out. So I went to see him. From the things I'd read I was afraid he'd be diminished, but he wasn't; he was fantastic. He came to the bar and didn't seem to have anyone with him so I just went up and engaged him in conversation. It was very human. I don't think he had any idea who I was, but he was completely accessible. So I asked him and he came in a couple of days later and played what he played."

Is there anyone he'd still kill to work with?

"It's not an ambition I ever really had. When I heard the Brodsky Quartet they had such an individual approach to the repertoire that so many people played—they had a genuine curiosity that made everything vivid and brought the music alive to me. I thought we operated in totally different universes and then I discovered they liked football and biscuits and rock'n'roll and they knew who I was. The collaboration we did was a wonderful thing and all these years later it has become another sort of repertoire. People can sing those songs—I think there are more covers of *The Juliet Letters* in its entirety than there are of the song *Almost Blue*. As a writer, you can't ask for anything more than that."

You imagine his biggest hits—the likes of *Oliver's Army*, *Every Day I Write The Book*, *Watching The Detectives*, etc.—have been covered widely, but he says not.

"My songs are tricky, very quirky—which is both the strengths and weaknesses of my songwriting for some people. They are densely packed with words so there's nowhere to put anything, which can be confounding for technical singers. It's a freakish thing I can do and they can't."

His younger self was somewhat protective of his songs and he's a little embarrassed about savaging Linda Ronstadt's cover of *Alison*.

"I was suspicious of the L.A. musicians playing those songs, which we felt were doing something new and were intended to replace that very muted approach. As the years have gone on, I have to acknowledge the money they brought in probably kept the wheels going round for about 18 months where it was in the balance whether this

would be a long-term career or a one-hit wonder.

"I did apologize to her from the stage of the Hollywood Bowl, no less, when I sang it. My father had Parkinson's in his last days and the idea that she is unable to sing because of that is upsetting. And there's a certain willfulness to her later career that I can identify with—like, 'OK, I'm going to do a record with Nelson Riddle, I'm going to do a record of Spanish songs my father taught me...'. "

Elvis is very proud that Johnny Cash recorded a couple of his songs—*The Big Light* and *Hidden Shame*, which he wrote specifically for him.

"I got to spend time with him through Nick Lowe and I even got to record with him. It's one of those things when you say, 'Fuck, did that really happen? Did I really meet Johnny Cash in a terraced house in Shepherds Bush? Is that something I dreamed?' But he was so gentle and real. He wasn't an affected fellow. And his wife was such a crazy personality, a real livewire. I wrote *Complicated Shadows* for him as well, which I'd loved to have heard him sing but sadly he didn't get to do that one."

And dare we mention The Pogues, who he produced at one time, and is said to have had a tempestuous relationship...and married the bass player, Cait O'Riordan.

Elvis chuckles. "There's a lot of stuff to unpack there! I don't think MacGowan ever liked me. He just thought I was some affected pop singer. He was a really good songwriter and when you hear the band at its best it was a tremendous thing, but it was all from the force of his songs and his voice. But I haven't heard anything that was operating at the level of those first two albums—everything you need to know is on the second album."

He's itching to get back on stage... and he'll keep working on new material until he can.

"I love the new record and the unusual circumstances we released it in only encourages me to keep working. If we cannot get out to see people and play for them, at least we are sending something else into the world. I don't want to pull the covers over and say, 'When is this going to be over?'. Because one day it will be over for real and you will have missed something."



Rick Fines

Compelling songs laced with stellar instrumentation results in a rich new recording. By Roger Levesque

By the time a seasoned musician reaches mid-life, you tend to welcome all that craft and history and devotion and wisdom that gives them an individual identity.

I argued with Rick Fines recently that he's a little self-deprecating on his own behalf, given long experience in acoustic folk-blues and soul sounds that make it a ready pleasure to hear his songs.

But for Fines, an award-winning singer, tunesmith, guitarist, and collaborator with decades of music behind him, it seems that you can never stop learning, expanding, and aging in the best sense.

"I never considered myself an artist," he explains, "because that was my development. It started with a love for guitar-based music, mostly rock'n'roll, then deeper into

the roots to find the blues. Then the gigs came where your established guitar vocabulary is shaped for the purpose of entertaining, getting people up on the dance floor.

"As time went by, there were messages I was perpetuating that I was not comfortable with, so I became a lyricist. At the same time your style is developing, your musical vocabulary is growing, becoming inextricably linked to emotion. That's the development of an artist. But I still think of an artist as having some valuable statement to make, some deeply human contribution to society."

However you call it, Fines's ability to spin a fine song asserts a compelling argument on *Solar Powered Too*, his first release in five years and his eighth name project overall. The title is punned as a sequel of sorts, after his 2006 disc *Solar Powered*. Both albums took root in a 12-by-12-foot cabin in the Kawartha woods just north of his hometown of Peterborough, ON. As he puts it, it's amazing what you can do with a couple of solar panels, four golf cart batteries, and minimal recording gear.

The original idea was to keep things spare,

and most tunes still are, but over the course of the pandemic he chose to open up the arrangements and add a few friends in a Toronto studio. Most notably, session aces Alec Fraser and Gary Craig contribute bass and drums, respectively, to about half the tracks. Other guests bring a little mandolin, fiddle, or harmonica and Fines's frequent past collaborator, Suzie Vinnick, is one of several vocalists to fill out the occasional chorus.

Fines plays four different guitars over the set's 12 tracks, including a small Cuban tres, even a baritone guitar on one piece, but the main plan going in was to focus on his National Steel Resonator guitar. The results are rich and delicious as he finesses stellar slide work to match that gravelly vocal.

Even more satisfying is the way his songs avoid falling into predictable format or thematic clichés. Sure, Fines taps a few vintage blues meters to get a groove going, as he does on the irresistibly bouncy *Never Let Go*, but those numbers often come off with a contemporary feel. He knows his influences but avoids ploughing over something original.

"I know who the bluesmen are," Fines acknowledges. "I've spent years studying their work, but it comes from a culture and a place and time and a people."

His lyrics can be as personal as it gets and the stories tend to be locally grown. Consider the compelling opener, *Below The Surface*, inspired by the loss of "several close friends in my musical life" over a short period of time, at home in Peterborough.

"Being no stranger to grief, I was walking around thinking about the people left behind by those friends. It just felt like the whole town had the blues."

Some losses take time to face. *Dark Days* was actually written a decade ago when his son was stillborn. It just took that long to finish.

You might think *Laundry On The Line* is a breakup song. It's actually about an old couple who were found dead at the kitchen table, destined to go out together from natural causes.

"It sounds morbid," he admits, "but it's the most romantic thing I've ever heard in my life."

The only cover comes in the singer's splendid take of *That's What Makes You Strong*, a favourite old Jesse Winchester number that features Jimmy Bowskill on mandola.

Fines co-wrote three songs with his old friend P.J. Thomas, matching his music to her lyrics and vice versa, then sitting down together to create another from scratch. Gainne Ryan helped pen two more, and the slow-rocking *You Only Want Me When You Need Me* is a co-write with Matt Anderson.

"Maturity can help the creative process when you're working with somebody. I've been in writing situations where it wasn't going well, but you learn that a song has a life of its own when you're writing with someone else, and you can't try to hold it to be everything you envisioned."

A few tunes faintly echo Fines's early work in Jackson Delta, the Juno-nominated acoustic blues trio that ignited his career. He was just 19 in the early 1980s when they wound up making their debut demo cassette album in Memphis's Sun Studios for a mere \$96. The enduring trio kept at it into the

mid-'90s before solo projects offered Fines a chance to quit his day job in a guitar store.

His work has seldom strayed from an acoustic feel since, save for *Driving Home*, the electric, full-band album he put out in 2015. Along the way, Fines picked up several Maple Blues Awards, Juno and Handy nominations, and an International Songwriting Award, crisscrossing the continent more times than he can remember to perform in solo, duo, or trio formations.

Like so many others, what was to be the singer's best touring year yet was radically altered when the pandemic came along but that hasn't stopped his urge to make music. He was still able to put in some limited gigs, workshops, and online lessons. And he's still sorting out his place in the firmament.

"As an entertainer, I wasn't comfortable with the title 'artist'. Not that I don't value entertaining and not that there isn't artistry within that. It's only recently that I've come to realize that's what my journey has been about, to try and express myself, and try to create something that wasn't here before."

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Garefowl

Ewan Macdonald

A scattered band of artful musicians recall the history and traditional music of St. Kilda.
By Roddy Campbell

St. Kilda sits out in the Atlantic Ocean—40 miles northwest of North Uist in the Outer Hebrides. While inhabited for at least two millennia, Hirta, the last populated island in this archipelago, was abandoned in 1930. It has since become one of Scotland's

six World Heritage sites and a critical breeding ground for sea birds, including the world's largest colony of northern gannets and the majority of Europe's puffins.

A dark stain, though, weighs heavily on St. Kilda's ecological past. In July 1840, the last great auk, or garefowl, in the U.K. was beaten to death there by four poor, illiterate, superstitious men who believed it was a witch.

One of those men was Lachlan MacKinnon, a direct descendant of multi-instrumentalist Ewan Macdonald—the cheerful mastermind behind a cluster of international musicians recording as Garefowl. And their wonderfully innovative, genre-expanding debut disc, *Cliffs*, marks two succinct St. Kilda anniversaries: 180 years since the death of the great auk and 90 years since the community was evacuated.

Gaelic puirt-a-beul, pensive, tender instrumentals built on a bedrock of fiddle, bouzouki, cello, viola da gamba, mandolin, harmonium, concertina, jaw harp, percussion, synthesizers—and, did I mention a bowed banjo—bob and weave amidst ambient synthesizers on assured interpretations of mostly traditional songs and tunes from St. Kilda.

Ewan, though, contributed one original instrumental (*A Bird From The Rock*) and his father, fiddler Murdo Macdonald, two (*A' Fagail Hiort* and *Pink Sandals On The Street*).

"My dad had the original idea for the project," says Ewan. "He had been to St. Kilda a couple of times, once on a volunteer conservation work party for a couple of weeks. He had been reminiscing for a while about the killing of the great auk coming up. And he said it would be nice to mark that musically in some way. It was only with the lockdown that I had time and space to actually work on it.

"The killing of the great auk is really quite a dark story and quite compelling. It's not a glorious piece of family history. It's slightly shameful and really sad that this amazing creature was killed in that way by people who didn't really know what they were doing and were cruel to it."

Flightless, the great auk once bred and foraged for fish across the North Atlantic. An imposing sculpture of it now sits on Newfoundland's Fogo Island. It was hunted to extinction for its prized down used for

pillows. The last known pair were killed off Iceland in 1844.

While *Cliffs* reflects upon the tragic event on St. Kilda, today seabirds on the archipelago also face annihilation due to rising sea temperatures.

“**W**hen I started looking into the situation of sea birds these days, there is a desperate situation there. Numbers are really declining [due to the repercussions of climate change]. Though we don’t actually physically kill them ourselves, with the lifestyles, and the things we do, we still cause their deaths. We should be more aware of our own actions and what we’re doing that ends up with the deaths of these seabirds.

“You might look at what Lachlan MacKinnon did and think that was really brutal. It was a really violent thing to do to a creature, but in a way, we’re doing something that is much worse. But we’re not on the front line; we don’t see the gore and the blood ourselves. One hundred and eighty years on, we haven’t necessarily learned the lessons of the great auk. We’re still causing the extinction of many wonderful creatures today.”

The seven-piece Garefowl consists of Scots, Irish, English, and American musicians. All also perform with other combos including All We Are, Ruined Spirit, and The Wanton String Band, an outfit Ewan describes as, “old-time American music with a drum kit.” He also plays in the 12-piece Band of Burns, an international conglomeration that focuses on the songs and tunes associated with the Scottish poet Robert Burns.

“That’s a really great project to be involved in,” says Ewan. “Everybody has their unique sound and voices to bring to the table. It’s also inspiring because we’ve band members not just from Scotland but from England, Turkey, Ireland, all over the place. It’s really good, this international approach to Robert Burns’s music, seeing how his songs and poetry really do have an international relevance and not just for the Scots. He’s a poet for everyone.”

Oddly enough, most of Garefowl initially met in, of all places, Istanbul, Turkey. Stuart Graham, bouzouki player and vocalist, had organized a gig there for his various disparate friends in an Irish bar for St. Patrick’s Day 2013.

“We hadn’t met each other before but it went down quite nicely,” says Ewan. “We pretended to be Irish. We ended up touring Turkey, Iraqi-Kurdistan, and Georgia. Stuart was living in Iraqi-Kurdistan at the time. He got us to play a festival [Nowruz (Kurdish New Year) celebration] in the mountains outside Duhok. The people were able to do their traditional dancing to ceilidh tunes.”

Considering their many musical interests and scattered lodgings, negotiating peace in the Middle East seems a simpler task than recording Garefowl. Yes? Apparently not.

“It was remarkably easy in a way. Apart from Spiff [Wiegand], who lives in the States, we gig quite regularly in other projects. We know each other’s style and approach to things. There’s a lot of trust there. When it came to it, it went remarkably smoothly. Different people, in their way, took charge of different tracks, took a more forward roll in arranging them, adding bits—more of a concertina on that, a mandolin or something, a bit of bouzouki, and they’d pass it on to someone to see what he thought. So, yeah, we played together so much before, even though we couldn’t be in the same room, it actually worked out OK.”

Raised in the Highland village of Strathpeffer, but now based in London, Ewan did most of the research for *Cliffs*. Several of its songs, and the stories behind them, have family connections. His grandmother, for instance, provided the background history for Ewan’s *A Bird From A Rock*, a dubious tale of a young islander kidnapped by a press gang and enslaved in Kansas. His great-great-great grandfather actually knew the woman in the lament *Mo Ghaol Òigear A Chùil Dunn* (*My Love, The Young Man With The Brown Hair*).

“I found this song on an archival recording. I was just looking up tape recordings of songs from St. Kilda and picking out the ones that had the most appeal. It was a great thing having that connection to a piece of music. My great-great-great grandfather had also known [Marion Morrison] who had written it. He heard it himself. That felt really special.”

While the gloriously atmospheric *Mo Ghaol Òigear A Chùil Dunn* is a lament, Garefowl play it strictly as an instrumental, rich in synth ornamentation replicating bird calls and countless other unpredictable shades of accompaniment. And no, they



A great auk (garefowl)

had no hesitation in layering electronics alongside fiddles, mandolins, bouzoukis... Such carefree instrumentation illustrates Garefowl’s outrageous approach to their magnificent traditional material.

“**I**sing a bit of Gaelic in the song about sheep [*Cas Na Caora Hiortaich O* (*Oh! The Legs Of The St. Kilda Sheep*)], but I wouldn’t be up to singing an entire lament in Gaelic,” Ewan says.

“I’m more a fiddle player than a singer. Also, more broadly, I like exploring the idea of vocals being used as a sound, using the voices as an instrument among other instruments rather than the star attraction, if that makes any sense. I was trying to get a sense of atmosphere rather than just telling a specific story.”

Obviously, the current COVID-19 pandemic has curbed any aspirations of taking the heroic, multi-textured *Cliffs* on the road. But it does beg the question: is Garefowl a project or a band?

“I suppose it’s a band. It would be amazing to tour *Cliffs*. We can’t even think about that at the moment. Hopefully, these times will soon end, and we’ll get back to playing live again. We’ll see what happens. If we feel like carrying on and recording more tracks, I think we’d all be interested in that, giving the band a bit more life beyond this album, so we’ll see.”



Okan

Toronto-based Afro-Cuban musicians dig into the roots of soaring, neglected, old rhythms.

By Lark Clark

“We make a hell of a team” says Magdelys Savigne, smiling broadly at her partner Elizabeth Rodriguez. Together they are Okan, meaning “heart” in the Afro-Cuban religion, Santería.

Elizabeth laughs, “It was the easiest name for Canadians to pronounce. Plus, we wanted people to know that we are making this music from our hearts.”

Their debut album *Sombras (Shadows)* was nominated for a Juno award in the world music category. “That’s a good start,” says Magdelys. Elizabeth chimes in, “After that, the pressure is on!”

Finishing each other’s sentences and

buoying their mood of enthusiasm, the duo radiates confidence and happiness.

Okan has just released their second album, *Espirale (Spiral)*. Ranging from Santería chants to classic ballads, Afro-Cuban jazz and original compositions, Okan flows from genre to genre. Magdelys, percussionist in the group, says, “People were expecting salsa. There are so many rhythms out there that are not salsa! We hit the wall with that the first year we were playing in Canada at festivals. You’re going to be entertained, but it’s not going to be just ‘Salsa Night’.”

I asked the women what it was like to grow up studying music in Cuba. Magdelys’s voice drops: “Hard. Not fun,” but Elizabeth picks up, “At the same time, it made me a very hard-working person. We have this now because of how hard it was in Cuba. My friends would knock on the door and my grandmother would say, ‘She’s practicing.’ We did not grow up like normal kids. But now we can make a living out of music.”

I am amazed what the women tell me

next: “Playing Cuban music was prohibited. No! They would tell you, ‘If we see you playing that music again, we will kick you out of this school.’ It was strictly classical music. Strictly! Nowadays, that has started to change a little bit. The craziest part is that Cuban music is so rich!”

Magdelys talks about another obstacle that she has had to face: being a woman percussionist. “Percussion is considered a male instrument. Even though I was playing orchestral percussion, I would still feel the hardships of being a woman playing percussion in Cuban society. Fortunately, these are things that I don’t see here. It makes me happy to be here!”

“But growing up, it wasn’t easy. There was lots of criticism: ‘Oh, you play like a girl!’, so I had to sound harder. I had to sacrifice my hands! I had to study harder, I had to prepare harder, just to show that I could do the same as a man. Many women before me were doing it but they got hell, and they still do today. It’s very sad.”

All this has made Okan even more deter-

mined to play the unexpected and to explore every style of music, spanning genres and digging into the roots of sometimes long-forgotten rhythms.

Magdelys observes, "A lot of Canadians go to Cuba but they hear the same songs over and over in the hotels. We want to let Canadians know that Cuban music has evolved over all those years. We want to bring that music here and open people's ears and minds to the next generation of Cubans."

Espirale opens with a Santeria chant that morphs into a lively guajira rhythm from the countryside of eastern Cuba. The music soars as Elizabeth's violin carries the melody, then flies into a peppery improv. Rhythms are complex, sometimes driving, sometimes languid, texture and tempo changing with an organic ease.

Okan works with a number of Toronto-based horn players, bassists, and pianists. For their rendition of *Besame Mucho*, the duo approached Cuban/Canadian jazz icon Hilario Duran. Elizabeth talks about their approach to the classic ballad.

"We wanted old-school piano. Hilario confessed that he wasn't entirely comfortable playing this because he's a deeply jazz musician. We said, 'You have all that experience and you have to share that with us!'"

"We have an amazing Canadian piano player, Jeremy Ledbetter, and we also have a Cuban piano player, Miguel de Armas. That's the fun thing with Okan. Every concert will be different—I'll say something different, there will be different solos. The flavour will be different."

Cuba produces many accomplished musicians, but something that stands out in Okan's music is their vocal blend, so tight it's almost uncanny. I asked the women if they had had to work at that.

"That just happened," says Elizabeth. "In Santiago de Cuba every song has harmony, and growing up there, Magdelys just learned the harmonies that way."

"I thought they were the melodies!" Magdelys exclaims. "When Elizabeth and I talk, we say the same things all the time. We had something from the very beginning. For us, it's like a game."

I asked the women of Okan what it's like forging a music career in a country as big as Canada.

"Oof! Very hard," says Magdelys. Elizabeth opines that as a culture, Canadians don't recognize the importance of the arts.

"We need Canadians to respect and acknowledge the arts more. Here the prices keep going up and people keep offering you a hundred dollars for a gig." They both burst into laughter.

"You say, 'Really? Cucumbers already went up another dollar!' It's difficult, but we are counting on support from the Canada Council, FACTOR, Toronto city council. It is a big, big help."

After one successful album and a second strong recording just released, Elizabeth sums up life for the duo right now: "We are trying to find our way, working as hard as possible, and showing that we are here to do this, no matter what."

Magdelys finishes Elizabeth's thought: "We take this seriously. This is our serious job."

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Eliza Gilkyson

A self-described socio-political artist, she just recorded the best album of her career.

By J. Poet

Eliza Gilkyson calls herself an old-fashioned folksinger. She believes music can change the world.

"Music gets people in touch with their souls and allows them to experience extreme feelings," she said from her home in New Mexico. "Everything [in America] right now is seducing us into shutting down and hardening up. Music has a way of opening you up and letting you feel your love for other people and the Earth. Music makes us safe and gives us a communal sense of being part of something bigger

than ourselves."

Her new album, *2020* (Red House Records), is one of her best and may be her most political collection. The songs remain hopeful, even when addressing the pressing issues of our time. *Peace In Our Hearts* is a tune perfect for singing at demonstrations. Gilkyson's passionate vocal is supported by electric piano and a sprightly drumbeat. *Sooner Or Later* is a funky blues, with a smooth, rolling rhythm. It urges us to join in the fight against ecological devastation. Gilkyson drops quotes from Robert Frost and the New Testament into a lyric that strikes a balance between truth and the hope for a brighter future.

She covers Dylan's *A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall*, Pete Seeger's *Where Have All The Flowers Gone* and premieres *Beach Haven*, a song she composed after reading a letter written by Woody Guthrie to Fred Trump, the president's father.

"Woody wrote to Fred Trump about the segregated apartment buildings he was renting out in the Beach Haven project in Brooklyn. The letter was so eloquent, the song wrote itself. I just added a chorus.

"I usually don't write an album this fast," Gilkyson continued. "Last summer, I had a light bulb go off in my head. I realized this would be the most important election of our lives. Since I'm a socio-political artist, it seemed wrong that I didn't have anything to address this event. I knew the election wasn't that far off, so I had a short window of time to get in the studio, write the songs, and get them recorded. I had to find the songwriting mood, but songs suddenly started coming to me.

"For me, the best way to write is often under pressure. You open the lid on the well of inspiration and hope something comes out, and they did. It usually takes me a couple of years to make a record. This time, I got the

idea in July. By September, we were finished.

"I wanted to run the gamut of feelings that I knew were coming. It was going to be a volatile year, so my agenda was to create songs of unity between the left, the Democrats, and the centrists. The left wasn't that excited about a centrist candidate, but I wanted to encourage people to keep their eye on the prize—stopping the right-wing takeover of our democracy.

"It was hard to put it into music. I didn't want to do anything that would exacerbate the differences. We're facing the loss of the natural world, the freedom of women to control their own bodies, and so much more. I knew we were scared, angry, and grieving. I wanted to chronicle the roller-coaster ride of emotions, from desperation to hopefulness."

After the songs were finished, Gilkyson assembled some of her favourite musicians and enlisted her son, the drummer Cisco Ryder Gilliland, as the producer.

"Luckily, we got in and out of the studio before COVID hit and we had to lock down. The basic tracks were cut live in a studio in Austin, TX. It was Cisco's idea. He thought we'd capture something live that you don't get building tracks from the ground up.

"We had a great time in the studio and cut everything in five days. It was fun to play live with a band, working out all the arrangements and capturing the energy of the moment.

"We did the overdubs and vocals in his home studio. We did some file sharing with other musicians, who were not in town. I'd send out a vocal and get back a guitar part or an ambient texture. Cisco had vision for how to bring it all home. He knew exactly what we needed to embellish the songs. It's a bit folk and a bit pop—we call it modern folk music."

Gilkyson grew up playing guitar. She started writing songs early. She released her first album, *Eliza 69*, when she was 19, but took a sabbatical to raise a family. She returned with *Love From The Heart* in 1979 and has been touring, writing songs, and recording ever since.

"I was an angst-driven youngster. I had some early family trauma that had to be worked through. Music gave me a place to express my anxiety. If you listen to my records chronologically, you'll hear the story of a talented girl who faced her mistakes to find herself and begin to speak in a voice that was not so self-absorbed, who was able to see the bigger picture and become a woman of the world.

"Today, being an older woman artist, there's so much negativity you have to manage, especially if you're not famous. I've always been under the radar. I constantly have to prove myself and fend off the judgments people have about older women.

"I also have to overcome my own feelings of being irrelevant. Aging triggers my own self-doubt, but fuck it! I'm gonna be out there doing my thing as long as I can. I want to be a model for younger women, without pretending I'm a youngster. Everyone young is gonna be old someday, so don't go quietly into that good night.

"It's a male-run world and, if you're past your child-bearing years, there's a fallacy that you're no longer useful. The only way to change it is for me to stay out there."





Maria Dunn

Positive stories of community activism and labour solidarity provide her inspiration. By Tim Readman

Maria Dunn's on Zoom telling a familiar tale about navigating the unfamiliar territory of online performing and socially distanced concerts.

"At the beginning of lockdown I looked into what others were doing, but I've realized I'd rather be spending my time writing songs," she says with a chuckle. "In concert, I realized how much I rely on teaching people the chorus and now that's the most dangerous thing! Now I have to ask people to hum along—so the pressure's off, they don't need to know the words!"

The Edmonton-based singer/songwriter and social activist has just released her excellent seventh album (produced, as always, by Shannon Johnson). The pandemic made completing the album tricky.

"We couldn't schedule for Shannon and I to get together with the engineer and listen all together in the studio." There was also a tour in England and Europe booked, which is on hold. In spite of everything, though, *Joyful Banner Blazing* is out. So how does she feel about it compared with the rest of her substantial body of work?

"There are things on it I've done all along and become known for, in terms of singing about workers' history, community history, storytelling about people's lives. There's more of an element of gratitude, I think. *Love Carries Me* is very much about gratitude to my parents. There's some songs I wrote a while ago that didn't fit on the previous concept albums, songs about family

like *Ontario Song* and like *Declan's Song* for my nephew when he was first born—the magical feeling of a new life. He's now 16!" she says laughing.

One of the most striking songs, which also inspired the wonderful cover artwork, is the title track.

"*Joyful Banner Blazing* is about my Aunt Cecily. She worked with young people for 40 years in Bermondsey, a working-class area of London in England. She was a Salesian nun and their philosophy is there's good in everyone. Her motto was, 'You are young, you are precious, you are loved.'

"She was known as the flying nun because she rode a scooter and she got things done—she was quite a whirlwind. At her funeral, the local people were lining the streets singing her signature song *She'll Be Coming Round the Mountain*. When I heard about that, I said I've got to try to capture that somehow!"

Waltzing With the Angels is another outstanding track with a great back story.

"I keep getting pulled into fascinating community projects. Two years ago, I went to a Sisters In Spirit march and my friend, Muriel Stanley Venne, a lifelong Indigenous activist, said, 'Maria, you have to write a song about the Métis ironworkers'.

"She's not a person I'd ever want to stay no to so I said, 'I'd absolutely love to!' She told me because of the danger of their work and being up so high they call it waltzing with the angels. So she gave me the title of the song.

"Alberta Labour History Institute had just interviewed the ironworkers. I spent the better part of a day reading the interviews and watching highlights and by the end of the weekend I was feeling pretty good about the song.

"I am looking forward to sharing the final version. That was one of those community things where you're invited in and trusted with that story, which to me is just a wonderful feeling."

Dublin With Love is a Ron Hynes song that has a different tone from the rest of the

album, so we talk about how it came about.

"I learned it before it was properly published. It was in the old days where you heard something you liked on the radio and rushed to the cassette deck and pushed record. So I had half of the song and I'd drive around singing harmony to that bit of the song.

"In the early 2000s, Ron was at Edmonton Folk Fest and we were doing the same workshop and he sang that song so I sang my harmony. I must have done a decent job because he invited me to sing with him at his concert the next day!

"He later said he thought a woman should sing it and maybe I should do it. I had my doubts as it seemed a bit angst ridden. Then an old sweetheart passed away and I ended up re-reading letters we sent each other. I remember thinking, 'Ron hit the nail on the head'. I can sing it now after reading how painfully intense I had been in those letters."

Our conversation turns to the topic of equity and diversity and I ask her to reflect on her own experience as a woman in folk music.

"I am really glad to see more people talking about equity in terms of numbers of women booked at festivals and in folk venues. You wonder, of all the people played on radio, how many were women, how many were Indigenous, how many were of colour. You wonder if there's still an unconscious bias, a systemic imbalance. There were definitely situations where I received sexist treatment. In the folk music world, there's a lot of men who are wonderful allies but studios, guitar stores, etc. are still male-dominated places."

With a career that now spans 22 years—a long and fruitful calling, and yet a hard row to hoe, I wonder aloud what keeps her going?

"A focus on sharing positive stories of community activism, on people who are making a difference. That's how we inspire people to get involved and take action. I'm not shying away from how awful it is to be on the picket line fighting for your job but I'm sharing the feeling of how positive it can be to be part of that solidarity. That element is always going to be a source of inspiration."

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Eric Hayes

Photo by: Joshua Hayes

As a youth, Canadian photographer captured historical images of folk and rock legends.

By Mike Sadava
Photos by Eric Hayes

A combination of nerve, luck, and a good eye allowed Eric Hayes and his Nikon camera to witness an important period of music history.

In the late 1960s, Hayes was barely in his twenties, living in England and publishing photos of some of the most influential folk and rock musicians. He shot a cover photo of John Lennon dressed as a wizard for *Rolling Stone*. He photographed the Rolling Stones in the studio during Brian Jones's last session before his death. He

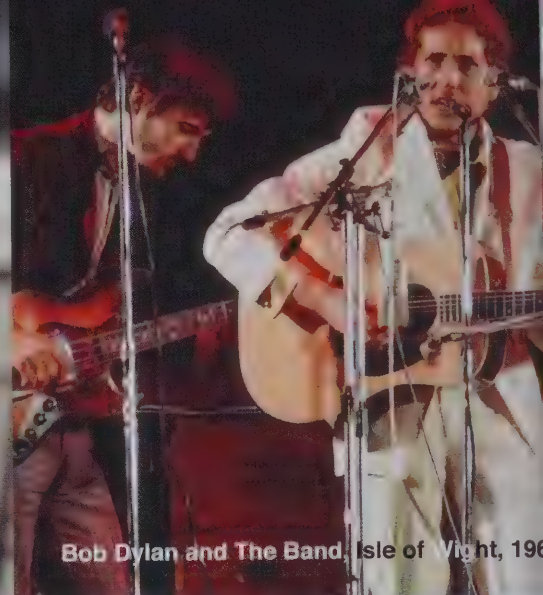
followed and photographed Ravi Shankar on a month-long tour in India, shot George Harrison teaching *She Came In Through the Bathroom Window* to Joe Cocker, a dishevelled Jimi Hendrix being interviewed in his London apartment. And his photos are on two iconic album covers of Fairport Convention.

Half a century later, some of these photos taken during an 18-month period are still turning up in various publications.

Now in his mid-seventies and living in Victoria, Hayes says that period in England was unforgettable in the way that some in the previous generation talk about the war, minus the violence and PTSD.

"A lot happens to people when they're young," Hayes says. "It was a couple of years of such intense activity."

At one point of his youth he wanted to be a musician, but soon realized his talents were elsewhere. "My guitar playing never would have gotten me into the studio with



Bob Dylan and The Band, Isle of Wight, 1969

the Rolling Stones, but my photography did."

He was going to photography school in California when Ravi Shankar was playing the Hollywood Bowl, and his idol George Harrison was going to be there. Hayes tried to get backstage and was ushered out, but managed to stand near the stage and take photos during the concert.

Oddly enough, there were no other photographers there, and he got a tap on the shoulder and a big man with a Liverpool accent said: "Mr. Harrison would like to see you during the break." He was invited to send some prints to Shankar's manager when they were developed.

They must have liked his photos. Months later, Hayes had dropped out of school and was on the way to India with his girlfriend when he got a telegram offering him a job to join a documentary film crew following Shankar around India and do the still photographs.

"I thought I'd be instantly enlightened. Like a lot of people, I saw India as a magic place."

India turned out to be more capitalistic than magical, but the tour went well, and he got to be in hotel rooms and at all-night concerts listening to Shankar and his tabla player, amazed by the polyrhythms of Indian music.

Hayes and his girlfriend stayed in India for months, got married in Mumbai, and with the help of a wedding present bought an old Land Rover and travelled overland to England.

They rented a bedsit near the Brixton prison in London and got into the Swinging Sixties way of life. With a big mop of curly



Jimi Hendrix



Fairport Convention working on *Liege and Lief*

hair and the dandified English clothes of the era, Hayes started hanging out in clubs like the Marquee and the 100 Club, taking pictures of the bands. More often than not, they'd ask to see prints.

One of the most enduring contacts was with Fairport Convention, who hired him for two of their most iconic albums—*Unhalfbricking* and *Liege and Leaf*. The latter session got him the cover photo on the first British issue of *Rolling Stone*, of Sandy Denny eating breakfast.

"We got along really well. I think it was because I was from Canada, not an American with a big ego."

For *Unhalfbricking*, Sandy Denny suggested shooting the band having afternoon tea in the garden of her parents' grand house in Wimbledon. The cover photo he ended up taking had her parents in the foreground outside the gate with the band behind the lattice fence, but somehow he got each head of a band member framed by a different large square in the fence.

Hayes was also with Fairport during the tragic period after the car crash that killed drummer Martin Lamble and Jeannie Franklyn, the girlfriend of Richard Thompson. He visited Denny in hospital and felt the grief.

"They were in shock, especially Richard Thompson from losing his girlfriend. I think it coloured the rest of his life, all those angry songs."

Eventually, Fairport came back even stronger, adding new drummer Dave Mattacks and Dave Swarbrick, one of the greatest-ever fiddlers in British traditional music.

Their producer, Joe Boyd, rented a house for the band to rehearse in and Hayes spent

two days there, shooting hundreds of candid shots in both black and white and colour slide formats for *Liege and Leaf*.

"It was a most magical experience. You're in this two-century-old country cottage, hearing Dave Swarbrick's fiddle from down below coming up the stairs."

Hayes is still in contact with some of the surviving Fairport members, including Simon Nicol, Thompson, and Boyd.

Hayes's contact with the Stones was pure luck and moxie. He went to their management office on the off chance, and a young manager said they just happened to be in the recording studio and needed some new pictures.

He spent a couple of all-night sessions while they were recording *Let It Bleed*, trying to stay invisible and out of the way.

"I was totally amazed at how hard-working they were. I went there thinking there'd be a haze of pot smoke and alcohol, but they were all business. They went from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. with a supper break at 2 a.m."

The one exception was Brian Jones, who seemed out of it. At one point, he asked Hayes to play an E note on the piano so he could tune his guitar, but was incapable of doing it. He later found out that the engineer had turned off Jones's mic while they were recording. Jones died months later.

Despite the glamour, Hayes and his wife were barely getting by and eventually decided to return to British Columbia. Broke and desperate for work, he got a job at a sawmill in Clearwater.

"I went from being a fashionable man



John Lennon



Mick Jagger

about town to working at a sawmill and living in a tiny log cabin."

But he soon got his photography career back on track, first at small weeklies, eventually moving up to national level publications. He photographed everyone, from lifers in a maximum-security prison to Brian Mulroney to nudists. He shot for publications such as *Maclean's*, *Canadian Geographic*, the *Toronto Star*, *Harrowsmith*, and even ads for Bacardi rum.

But some of his old music photos still occasionally pop up in publications. His Hendrix shots and pictures he took in 1966 of Jimmy Page playing with The Yardbirds have been published in extremely expensive coffee table books. And recently, his pictures were picked up by a major American music archival website called Reelin' in the Years, <https://photos.reelinintheyears.com>.

Hayes believes in the old saying that the way to get good photographs is, "set your lens at f8, and most of all, be there." He was there, and his persistence is still paying off after 50 years.

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Kronos Quartet

Acclaimed, trail-blazing string quartet now set to Pete Seeger's fascinating repertoire.

By Roger Levesque

“We’re used to stretching our ears.”

Something of an understatement coming from David Harrington, the violinist who founded Kronos Quartet in 1973 with a mission to focus on 20th century composers and new works.

It’s no exaggeration to reiterate, Kronos has reinvented the string quartet for contemporary ears. After more than 60 recordings

and 1,000-plus commissions, they’re rightly famous for pushing the frontiers of the two-violin/viola/cello medium from experimental works such as George Crumb’s *Black Angels* and Steve Reich’s *Different Trains*, surveying global sounds from many corners of the world in collections like *Pieces Of Africa*, interpreting jazz and framing spoken word, or collaborating with the greats, from tango master Astor Piazzolla to Bollywood diva Ashe Bhosle.

Ensnconed in San Francisco for decades, Kronos have recently raised their bows to recast songs of the American folk vernacular; 2017’s excellent *Folk Songs* found them tackling traditional tunes with singers Rhianon Giddens, Natalie Merchant, Olivia Chaney, and Sam Amidon, to soulful effect.

Now, with the release of *Long Time Passing* on Smithsonian-Folkways, Kronos

and folk friends from the Bay Area and beyond celebrate the legacy of that visionary pioneer of modern folk and protest songs, Pete Seeger, who died in 2014. Gearing the album to the centenary of Seeger’s birth in 2019 made sense but I wondered aloud to the quartet’s leader, why folk, why now?

It came in an early morning conversation as he grabbed a mask and mobile phone to start his two-mile daily trek from home to the Kronos office/rehearsal space on the edge of Golden Gate Park.

In the end, Harrington says it’s all about finding “fabulous tunes”, whether they arise from India or Pete Seeger’s banjo. But it turns out that Seeger’s *Kisses Sweeter Than Wine* was stitched into a piece on the first-ever Kronos record from 1982, and long before that Harrington grew up in a household where folk albums were played



and appreciated.

Harrington even forgot that he has had Seeger's home phone number on his cell for years, though he never called the folk icon because, "I never knew what I could say." Now, America's political turmoil left him feeling that this was as appropriate a time as any to make that "call" in a tribute.

"The times we're in are as confusing as any time I can recall. Somehow it all relates to why I formed Kronos in the first place. It's all related, all a set of variations."

In a liner note Harrington adds, "I would be happy if this music did anything to help unseat Trump and his henchmen in any small way."

The quartet's forays into self-produced home videos of campaign songs to help get out the vote for Nov. 3 led me to wonder

how he sees the current climate for the protest song.

"I feel like musicians are being looked to and some of us haven't realized that yet. It's not business as usual and we need to find new ways using every tool we can think of. We need to be in touch with how young people are communicating. Musicians have a lot to do right now but we're also being looked to for solutions and ways forward. I think it's a time of real potential."

Harrington hopes that Seeger would be happy to hear his music live on in fresh interpretations.

"Music has such a direct avenue to the inner person so it's up to the artistic community and maybe specifically musicians to listen as carefully as you can. The extent of Pete Seeger's curiosity and ability and courage was a great example and we need to be looking for those examples."

Over the years, Kronos has set its own example, rewriting the rules of string techniques, and *Long Time Passing* sometimes finds Hank Dutt's viola and Sunny Yang's cello imitating Seeger's clawhammer banjo style, while Harrington and John Sherba take off on their violins. The wonderfully eclectic album involved some new explorations of old techniques.

"We're used to finding other ways to approach the instruments we grew up with. For me this is an opportunity to explore, never a limitation. You use what you have and turn it into whatever you need."

On some tunes the quartet takes on a faint echo of early folk streams but Kronos always finds a splash of noisy bowing, as you will hear at the start of Bill Steele's environmental anthem *Garbage*.

The 15 tracks of *Long Time Passing* run the gamut with originals Seeger wrote or co-wrote like *Waist Deep In The Big Mud-dy*, *If I Had A Hammer*, and *Where Have All The Flowers Gone*. Then there are songs he discovered and folded into his repertoire, such as *Mbube* (or *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*), the traditional *We Shall Overcome*, or a tranquil Hindi folksong he borrowed from Mahatma Gandhi.

"We grew up with some of these songs and have heard them in a variety of settings, so we're conscious of being part of a living tradition and helping to pass that on."

Turn, Turn, Turn reminds you that Seeger had the foresight to adapt *The Bible* (Eccle-

siastes). Two numbers recorded live in Barcelona mark remnants of the Spanish Civil War: *Anda Jaleo* (Federico Garcia Lorca's words) and the Seeger/Woody Guthrie take on *Jarama Valley*. Another song, *The President Sang Amazing Grace*, has no Seeger connection, though Harrington is correct in thinking that the folk godfather would have loved its story and gospel inflections.

This fascinating glimpse into Seeger's world wouldn't be complete without *Storyteller*, a 16-minute quasi-documentary featuring spoken clips of the man himself with contrasting music by Kronos' lead arranger, Jacob Garchik—who also charted most of the other tunes on the album.

The folksingers? Sam Amidon returns from *Folk Songs* alongside Maria Arnal, Brian Carpenter, Seeger collaborator Lee Knight, Meklit, and Aoife O'Donovan, often singing together, but the real special guests are a choir of third graders. The seed of the whole Seeger project took root in May 2018 when Kronos was playing a concert organized by Harrington's daughter, school teacher Bonnie Quinn. So it was only appropriate that 100 elementary school kids sing on *We Shall Overcome*.

"That was the circle of this album, beginning and ending in that classroom, and the idea that a hundred kids now know the words of that great song was a thrilling thing for Kronos to be a part of. It will radiate in its own way."

Sadly, *We Shall Overcome* also captures the harsh reality of trying to make a living in a pandemic. Like so many others, Kronos saw their touring drop overnight. Recently they gave up their regular rehearsal space to fold everything into an office. Harrington meets composers in the park.

But necessity inspires invention, too. Kronos has taken its first steps in long-distance recording, and Harrington's walk to work every morning helps to keep him in shape for making music that matters.

"I hope to create bulletproof music, music that can wrap itself around suffering, music to energize us to solve the immense problems that exist on this planet right now."

For a special look at the Kronos/Seeger project see Carnegie Hall Live: Kronos Quartet and Friends – Long Time Passing, a 37-minute musical documentary on YouTube.



Bon Débarras

Diverse artistic landmarks spark their approach to songs and traditional dance tunes.

By Pat Langston

The socially distanced audience was a scant 70 people but that was enough for Québec traditional trio Bon Débarras to rediscover the joy of live performing.

Like so many artists, the Montréal-based threesome had their summer touring plans wiped out by the pandemic. Unable to perform and locked down, “I felt like a wild animal in a cage,” says multi-instrumentalist and percussive dancer Dominic Desrochers.

So, when Bon Débarras finally got together before a live, albeit modest, audience in September at Montreal’s Festival La Grande Rencontre of traditional music and dance, it was like a gift, says Jean-François Dumas, also a multi-instrumentalist.

“It was because we lost [performing live] that we realized how precious it was.”

“The best way to share music is with people in front of us, soul from soul and breath from breath,” adds violinist Véronique Plasse.

The province’s COVID-19 restrictions meant the festival audience couldn’t dance, but “we saw people tapping their feet and we saw in the bodies and smiles that something was happening between the people. It’s never like that when we watch something on the screen.”

Tapping feet are the least of what Bon Débarras is usually all about (the band’s

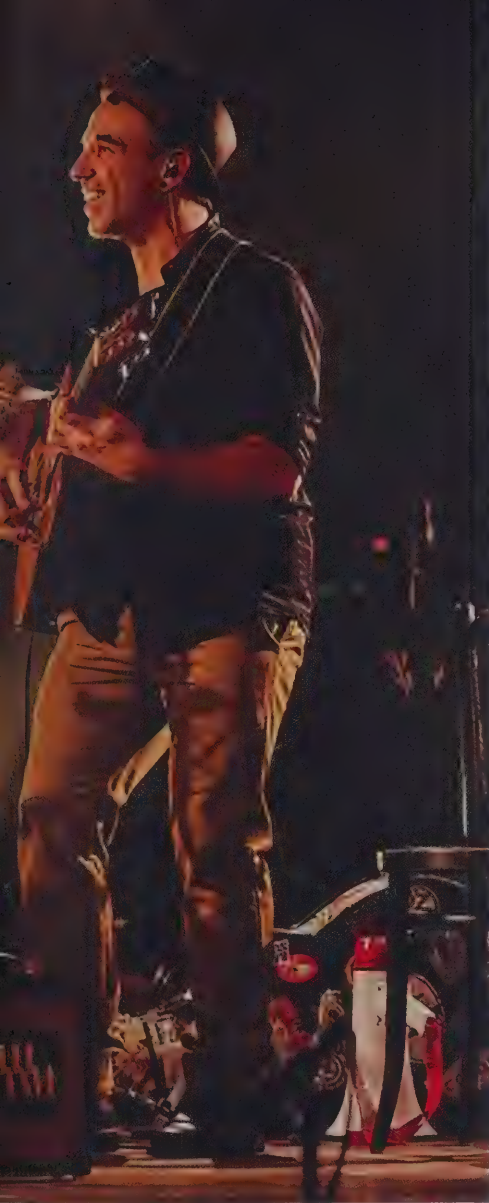
name translates as both “good riddance,” as in using music to dispose of negative feelings, and “attic” or other storage spot, a reference to the trio’s love of digging up and repurposing older artistic materials).

Along with four albums, an EP and its stage shows, the trio has carved out a niche with their popular, for-hire evening dance parties. They provide the music while caller Yaëlle Azoulay keeps the dance floor orderly.

“Music is movement and movement is music,” says Desrochers. “Especially for step dancing: because it’s rhythmic, the frontier between a musician and a dancer is very thin.”

That minimal distance is especially true of traditional music, which is made for dancing, says Dumas, pointing to flamenco as an example.

Dance and music regularly join forces on



the band's recently released album *Repères*. The album's name means "landmarks" in English, and points to how the band's music, which is rooted in the culture of not just Québec but French-speaking North America, is informed by diverse artistic landmarks.

Gigue de garage, composed by Desrochers, yokes music and dance by blending a jig with the sound of his joyful footwork.

"I was in a garage and wanted to create a new dance," he says. "But I was like a writer with a blank page. So, I started to compose the music instead of the dance; that's why it's called *Gigue de garage*."

Education also sits high on the band's priority list. Playing Hooky is an interactive performance series offered to schools and children's festivals across Canada and France. The teacher's handbook alone, viewable at bondebarras.ca and packed with

musical history and suggestions for student activities, is worth the price of admission.

Playing Hooky, which was one of the two shows they did at the Montréal festival in the fall, holds a key place in the band's collective heart. It's all about transmitting heritage, explains Dumas, especially when they perform in their home province.

"This music is part of our culture, so we want to share it with as many people as we can. We like [children] to have a taste of where they're from."

Desrochers adds that youngsters are growing up in a society obsessed with instant popularity and fame, so learning about one's roots teaches them that life is not about instant results but about the path to get there.

"It's about a mode of life, to feel joyful, about a practice like yoga. That's what folk music and dance is to us."

"We hope that feeling is contagious to the kids—not only the music but the community," interjects Dumas.

Besides, kids are fun to perform for. They can be a demanding audience, they hold nothing back, and they love to contribute to the Q&As that follow the shows.

"They want to share their experience," says Plasse. "They tell you, 'I play the fiddle, too!'"

Plasse's violin and voice are at the heart of the gorgeous *Avec un peu d'âme* on the new album. She took a poem by esteemed Quebec writer/musician Gilles Vigneault and set it to a waltz melody.

"It's a beautiful poem about the courage of love. I like how he took something so simple and found the right words," she says. "When I read it, a rhythm and melody entered my mind."

Nutshimit is also a blend of Bon Débar-

ras's music and another's words, in this case those of Innu poet Joséphine Bacon. A kind of hopeful hymn to the peace of interior, geographical, and ancestral landscapes, the song mixes French lyrics with Bacon reciting in her native Algonquian Innu-aimun tongue.

Dumas says he met Bacon, who's lived in Montréal since the 1970s, years ago and that eventually led to the band's invitation for her to collaborate on the track.

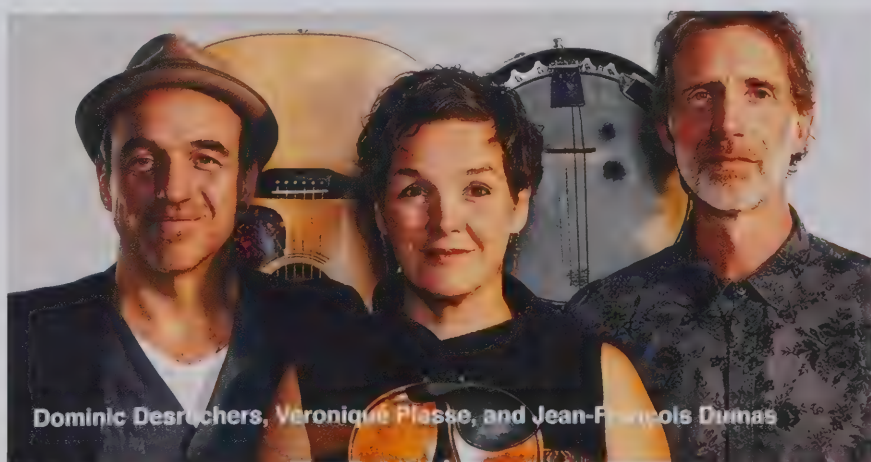
"She's like a bridge between cultures and nations, and that's what we want to do."

Dumas's two band mates are quick to weigh in on what First Nations peoples and French-Canadians share and what is divergent. Plasse says the two share a deep connection with nature, for example, while Dumas points to the rupture between the previously co-operative groups that occurred with the British conquest of 1759 as well as the mixing of different cultures in Québec since then.

"We have a DNA heritage [with First Nations peoples] because there was lots of intermarriage. I see similarities in our dance," adds Desrochers, bringing the conversation back to music.

Which, of course, is how *Repères* ends. As its name suggests, Dumas's instrumental *Reel du rêve* is based on a dream. The idea came to him after a three-day meditation retreat and recreates what he dreamt: a gradual gathering of musical friends and family around a twilight fire that opens with a violin, adds percussive dancing, builds as more instruments, variations, and voices chime in, and culminates as an exuberant celebration of music, community, and life.

Says Dumas, "It was a gift from my psyche."



Dominic Desrochers, Veronique Plasse, and Jean-François Dumas



Hayes Carll

Texan reinvents songs from his colourful career in fresh, energized acoustic settings.

By J. Poet

Although he's best known as a roots rocker and an Americana star, Hayes Carll considers himself a folksinger. He grew up in Texas, a place, he says, where music was always in the air.

"You could hear Willie Nelson in the background, everywhere you'd go," Carll said from his Nashville home. "He's part of the culture, but I was drawn to songwriters like John Prine, Kristofferson, Lyle Lovett, and Townes Van Zandt. I grew up singing along with songs that spoke for me and

articulated things that I struggled to express on my own. If there was going to be a dream job for me, writing songs was it.

"I was writing before I knew how to play guitar. I was fascinated by language—short stories, poetry, and songs. It went into hyper-drive when I got a guitar at 15. I learned chords from a music book, but didn't know how to put them together with songs until I found three songbooks—Jimmy Buffett, Bob Dylan, and Willie Nelson. I knew all the lyrics by heart, so learning how to put the chords with them came pretty quick."

Carll was playing shows at 15 and started touring after graduating from college. His debut album, *Flowers and Liquor*, included *Down the Road*, a song that compresses the musical and political history of the United States into four densely packed verses.

"That song changed the trajectory of my career. It was a regional hit in Texas. I went from playing for 50 people to 500 people,

and I could afford to bring a band on the road with me."

Down the Road became one of Carll's signature tunes and it's featured again on his latest record, *Alone Together*. It's not a greatest-hits album but it includes 11 songs that span his songwriting career, recorded in stripped-down, mostly acoustic versions. The idea of reinventing some of his favourite tunes occurred to him at a party that took place at his home late last year.

"Every six months or so, Allison [Moorer, Carll's wife] and I invite a bunch of people over to play music. The party was almost over when [songwriter] Darrell Scott showed up. We've written songs together but we don't usually play them together after they're done.

"We started playing *Sake of the Song* and it was revelatory to me. As we played it, it took on a life of its own. The next day, I called him up and asked him if he wanted to

make a record with me.”

Carll and Scott went into a Nashville studio and cut two Carll originals, *Sake of the Song* and *Times Like These*, and a cover of the Merle Haggard/Lefty Frizzell hit *That's the Way Love Goes*. They both agreed the minimal arrangements captured a unique energy. Then the pandemic hit and the lockdown started.

“We couldn’t get into a studio, so Darrell suggested finishing the record at home. ‘Why don’t I do my parts at my house and you do your parts at your house. If we want anyone else, we can have them fly their parts in.’ He told me he’d just done an album recording remotely and helped me feel relaxed about doing it that way.

“I bought some recording gear and learned how to use it the best I could. I sent him songs, just guitar and vocals, and he added the elements that brought everything to life. I did my part of the recording in a couple of nights. Darrell added his parts in a day and half, maybe two days. It moved pretty quickly.

“I had ideas for how I wanted to do the

songs. I’ve been playing ‘em live for a long time and they take on a new significance as I change the lyrics and the way I perform them. I didn’t want to rehash the old arrangements. I wanted to bring a new light to them.

“Take *Times Like These*. On my last album, *What It Is*, it was a straight-ahead, boogie rock, barn-burner. I felt a little of the angst and anger that I was feeling when I wrote it got lost in translation. I put it in a drop D tuning and made it a little slower and swampy, so the lyrics would land and resonate. Politically, things have gotten more contentious and then the pandemic hit and the phrase took on an added meaning. We’re living in bizarre times and out of all the songs, that’s the one that’s most relevant to the current situation.”

In addition to his own songs, Carll also re-cut one of his favourite covers, Scott Nolan’s *Bad Liver and a Broken Heart*. It first appeared on his *Trouble In Mind* LP.

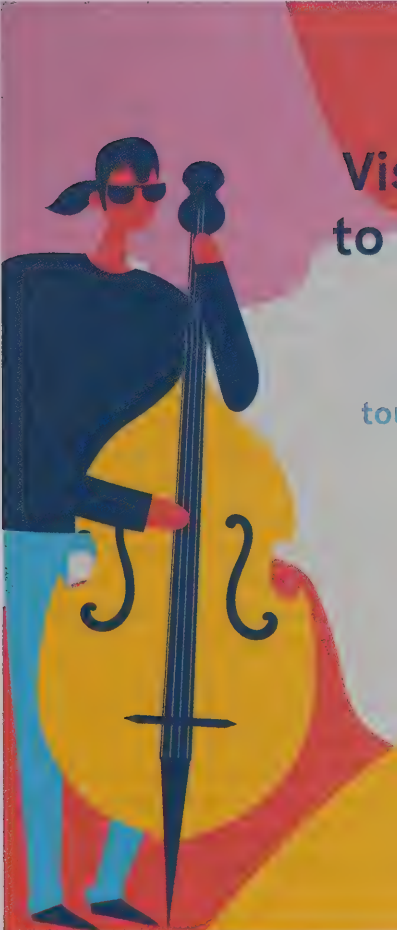
“It began life on that record as a Rolling Stoney, rock’n’roll song, but for years I’ve been playing it live in a more folky,

stripped-down fashion, so the lyrics could be heard. It lands differently when you play it that way.

“I also covered Merle Haggard’s version of *That's the Way Love Goes*. I haven’t recorded it before this. I heard it growing up and Allison taught it to me at a festival we played in Scotland. They asked us to perform together but we didn’t have any songs prepared. We both loved *That's the Way Love Goes*. It’s a beautiful, classic song. Merle and Johnny Rodriguez both had a No. 1 hit with it, so I wanted to capture it on record.”

Carll was going to tour to support the album but the lockdown has forced him to make other plans.

“I did two band shows early in the year. It’s fun to rock out and have different beats and instruments adding energy to the songs but I also like playing solo. It’s where I’m most comfortable, which is another reason to make this record. It captures my most natural space as a performer. Getting Darrell to add his parts was an unexpected bonus.”



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The Dardanelles

Their new disc offers exhilarating arrangements of Newfoundland's tunes and songs.

By Jean Hewson

In 2005, a talented group of young folk based in St. John's, NL, formed a band called The Dardanelles (shortened by the locals to "the Dards").

Named after a narrow street in their hometown (not the narrow strait in Turkey), the group quickly became a local favourite, packing venues and dance floors wherever it went.

They released their first, self-titled, album in 2009, and the popularity that they enjoyed at home grew to encompass audiences throughout the folk festival scene in North America and the U.K. Their second album, *The Eastern Light* (2011), was produced by one of trad's luminaries, Irish guitarist John Doyle, and cemented their position as one of Canada's finest young folk groups.

Then, life happened. Fiddler Emilia Bartellas was accepted into med school, moved to Ottawa, and became a doctor. Bodhrán player Richard Klaas took a high-level job with Parks Canada. Box player Aaron Collis formed and began touring with another successful Newfoundland band called Rum Ragged. Singer Matthew Byrne divided his time between The Dardanelles and his burgeoning career as a solo artist, and got married and had a child. And guitarist Tom Power moved to Toronto to host CBC's *Radio 2 Morning*, and eventually ended up as the genial, approachable host of CBC Radio's flagship entertainment talk show, *Q*.

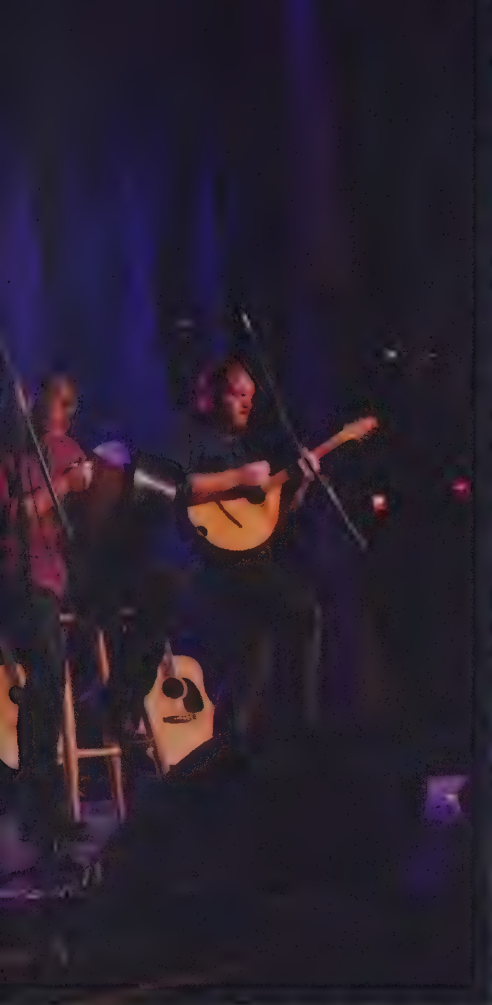
The band still played shows as time allowed, but the seasons passed. And in 2019, they realized it had been eight years since the release of their last album.

"There was definitely a moment in all of our lives where we thought, 'Are we still going to be able to do this?'," says Power. "We've often said to each other that we were never going to let anything get in the way of our friendship—not frustration or separation or being on the road—and we would never let anything get in the way

of caring about one another and enjoying playing music together."

Matthew Byrne ran into John Doyle at a folk festival in Connecticut, and Doyle mentioned how he had enjoyed working on *The Eastern Light* and expressed his desire to work with the band in the future. When Byrne delivered this news to his friends, they thought it was a good omen and decided to forge ahead with plans for a third album.

"We got together at a cabin in Chelsea, Quebec," remembers Power. "Matthew was on tour in Ontario, and Emilia and I both live in Ontario, so it was cheaper and more convenient to fly in Aaron and Rich than it was for us to go home. We did a pre-production weekend there, and figured out what tunes and songs we had. In about three days of hanging out, we got work done that normally would have taken a couple of months. We did some demos and sent them off to John, and by the grace of God and the Newfoundland Labrador Arts Council, we were able to go home and do the recording with the exact same producer and the exact same engineer [Don Ellis] as the last time."



In the Spring, That's the Time was released Nov. 20, 2020. The title, a line from the province's most famous logging song, *The Badger Drive*, evokes optimism and the return to work and normal life after the hardships of a long winter—pertinent, given world circumstances.

The Dardanelles render a hearty, swinging version of the song, which was written by John V. Devine of King's Cove after he was fired from his job as a scaler with the Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company. He thought that if he wrote a piece praising the company and its management, he might win his job back.

His instincts were solid—in the spring of 1912 he performed the song at a St. Patrick's Day variety show in Grand Falls at which many of the company's notable employees were present. He was allegedly reinstated shortly thereafter.

Matthew Byrne's gorgeous voice is undoubtedly a highlight of the album, but so are the band's exhilarating arrangements of Newfoundland dance tunes. Like beautifully stitched quilts, sets of jigs, reels, and singles are sewn together into heirlooms

"There's been a lot of work done by other musicians to make people back home familiar with the music, love the music, and accept the music as a part of their identity."

— Tom Power

that provide a glimpse into the past while remaining grounded in a raucous and danceable present.

The tunes themselves come from many of the province's great source musicians, including Rufus Guinchard, Emile Benoit, Clarabelle Fennelly, and Luke Payne. The repertoire of these folks would not have survived and been imparted to The Dards without the efforts of the in-between generation of musicians and tune collectors such as Christina Smith, Kelly Russell, and Daniel Payne.

"There's been a lot of work done by other musicians to make people back home familiar with the music, love the music, and accept the music as a part of their identity," muses Power.

"And the music has always changed and evolved and no one is gate-keepery about it—if your family goes back generations or if you moved to Newfoundland in the last week you can have this music as part of who you are."

The album was originally slated to come out in May, and even though COVID-19 prevented that from happening, the band decided they didn't want to sit on the recording too long.

"People are at home and need things to listen to," says Power. "And we didn't want to wait and make it 10 years between albums instead of nine. As soon as we can go on the road, we will. Things are a little more challenging—people have jobs and are starting to have kids, but we are dying to perform. We just really love this music. We don't play it out of a sense of duty or tie it up with a sense of preservation—we truly adore it and perhaps that love is a bit infectious and makes our listeners dig into it.

"I saw a great quote recently from Martin Carthy, something to the effect of, 'If the folk club and folk festival system works, it's a really beautiful way to live your life.' We've been so fortunate to be a part of that world and to have a chance to introduce Newfoundland music to people who've never heard it before."

"The Canadian roots vet makes a record for the ages. Killer stuff throughout."

Midwest Record – USA

"Solar Powered Too epitomizes what roots music is all about, raw, down to earth and coming straight from the heart ... masterfully played with a freshness and vitality that is totally engaging."

Blues and Roots Music Blog – USA

"A disc with verve as deep as it is jubilant." *Paris-move.com* – France



"With **"Solar Powered Too"**, Rick Fines has recorded a beautifully varied roots album, which highlights his talents as a musician and songwriter like never before."


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 **OUTSIDE MUSIC**



Dirk Powell

A deeply thoughtful artist, he recruits a stellar international all-star cast for his new disc.

By Tony Montague

Dirk Powell is a roots renaissance-man—a multi-instrumentalist, singer, songsmith, collaborator, producer, and writer—fired by a deep love of Appalachian, Cajun, and Celtic music and the communities from which they spring. His skill at blending those traditions harmoniously with contemporary sounds stands unequalled.

Such is the demand for Powell to work on the projects of other artists that the recently

released collection of his own songs, *When I Wait For You*, is his first solo album in six years. Recorded in Powell's studio on the banks of Bayou Teche, LA, it invites the listener into the family home and the heart of his creativity.

"The title, and a lot of the themes of the songs, is very much about the music I make late at night—intimate music, and this feeling of warm, late-night energy where the light is close and you're waiting for somebody. And the question is, 'What if they don't turn up?', or 'How attached are you to them coming?', or 'Is the experience of waiting in itself the thing?'"

"When I titled the record *When I Wait For You* I hoped the audience would feel themselves as the 'you', that they would feel welcomed into my late-night creative world, and the ups and downs of romantic relationships, mixed in with other deep

things in life."

To help him create imaginative arrangements for this new roots music, Powell called on a core of musician friends from his time playing in the BBC's famed Transatlantic Sessions series: Anglo-Irish woodwinds wizard Michael McGoldrick, Scots fiddler John McCusker, percussionist James Mackintosh, and accordionist Donald Shaw, who also co-produced the album with Powell.

"Those guys are so interested in culture and music and life, and so vibrant with it all that to bring them here, and do things like take them to some little zydeco clubs, was just a wonderful experience—seeing how they responded to the feeling around here, which is pretty saturated," he recalls, with a wry laugh.

"It's pretty humid, pretty sultry, pretty languid in a way. The pace is a bit differ-

ent, more closely related to the Caribbean than other parts of the United States. They tapped into that—and the pace and the feel that we have are reflective of it.”

Nowhere is this more evident than on the gorgeous waltz *Les Yeux De Rosalie*, co-written with McGoldrick.

“Mike has always loved Cajun music—the soulful simplicity of it. He already had that melody and I just thought how cool it would be to make it into more of a Cajun tune, lyrically and everything. So we changed the melody a little bit. I love it where James goes into a two-step at the end. He never loses the traditional feel with his drumming, where it squares off into some kind of straight-ahead beat. He can play a drum kit like it’s a traditional instrument.”

On *When I Wait For You*, the spectrum of vocal and instrumental colours and textures is wide. There are no less than 17 friends, guests, and family-member musicians. And as well as singing lead, Powell plays an array of instruments—acoustic and electric guitars, fiddle, fretless banjo, bass, piano, mandolin, keyboards, button accordion, percussion, and mellotron.

The sole traditional song is *The Silk Merchant’s Daughter* from West Virginia, a rare ballad with a happy conclusion.

“There’s a shipwreck and everyone is on a lifeboat—either they’re all going to starve or somebody has to die, so cannibalism. They draw straws and the daughter gets the short one. And so this young sailor offers his own life instead. I’m getting tears just thinking of it, especially in this day and age when you see so many people living lives that are so self-focused.

“I find it inspiring that in the story she didn’t even know he loved her, and his first declaration is, ‘I’ll die in your place’—though another ship appears and he doesn’t have to. It’s always moved me so much. For me, it’s an example of what human beings are capable of. The potential for violence is there—the worst—yet it turns around and has a joyful ending, and they marry.”

The Silk Merchant’s Daughter contrasts with so many murder songs and grisly ballads—such as *Down In The Willow Garden*, *Knoxville Girl*, and *Pretty Polly*—that Powell learned from old-time musicians, in which young women are the victims.

“And the murderer just walks away, he’s this roguish semi-romanticized figure. Even

if the man in these songs is condemned it’s about him being hung, and what he’s thinking on the gallows. It’s not about the victim.

“I guess I’d never thought that much about the words. I remember singing some of those songs, and having Sophie and Amelia, my daughters, look at me like, ‘Why are you doing a song about a woman getting violently killed?’”

“One day I was singing *Pretty Polly* and heard the words coming out of my mouth ‘stabbed her in the heart’ and ‘her heart’s blood did flow’, and I just stopped cold. I know too many stories that are good, like my Uncle Clyde and Aunt Myrtle who were happily married for 70 years. I just thought, ‘That’s what I want to inspire people with, not these others.’”

So Powell wrote *I Ain’t Playing Pretty Polly*, and recorded it with backup vocals from Amelia and fellow songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Rhiannon Giddens, who’s a close friend.

“We’ve written a lot of songs together and we’re still working that way, doing things collaboratively. It’s one of those relationships where every time that you bring something, the bar gets raised a little bit—creatively, you go higher. That collaboration is really important to me. We do things like texting lines for limericks back and forth all the time. It’s like practice for songwriting—you get your rhymes constantly flowing.”

Giddens plays viola and banjo on *When I Wait For You*, and sings on two other Powell compositions—the bright, folk-pop ditty *Jack Of Hearts*, with harmonies and laughter from Amelia and Sophie; and the contrasting *Say Old Playmate*, which touches on the issue of racial separation in American society while staying within close-family experience.

“It’s based on something that happened to my dad when he was a kid, not an uncommon story, where his best friend was African-American and then one day the adults in my dad’s life said, ‘you’re not allowed to be friends anymore’.

“When my dad would tell this story I could see the look of hurt on his face. Even now, he still can’t process it, he has this look of pain and confusion like he’s still eight-years old.

“So I just wanted to write it from his perspective, addressing his friend: ‘where are you now? I haven’t seen you in so long.

Do you tell your grandkids about me, how they wouldn’t let us play together?’ It’s not just about race, it can be about religion or whatever. I wanted a song that addressed all of that.”

Powell is a deeply thoughtful artist, as evinced in particular by *Some Musical Origins*...—a piece of writing prominently posted on his website—in which he reflects on traditional music and memories of his Papaw, his grandfather from East Kentucky who taught him to play fiddle and banjo, and gave him so many traditional songs and tunes. He led Powell to discover his passion and his path in life.

As he writes, ‘It was more than watching or listening: all of my being focused itself on carving one channel through which the music could flow into me in a permanent way.’

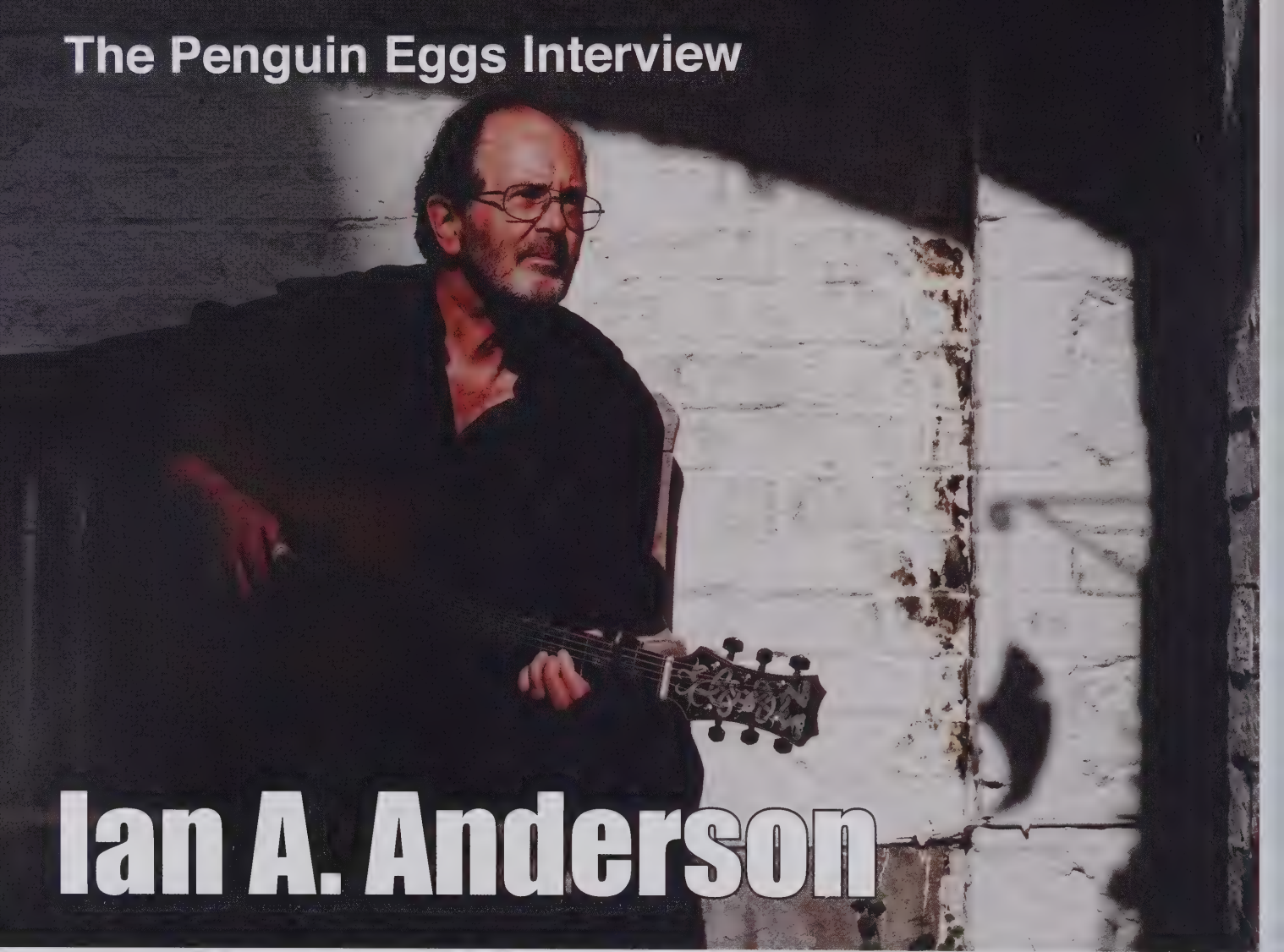
“I’ve seen the same with my daughters, who are now 15 and 18,” Powell adds. “There’s something about having it be foundational, and formative, and something you know is building up your body chemistry. It’s defining you, it’s forming you. And at that age, learning that way from him, I felt it forming me—‘this is who I’m becoming because it’s flowing into me, and creating who I am out of all the choices of what I could be’.

“I’ve actually been working on a book that encompasses some of that story and those things, to explain maybe to somebody who’s a non-musician just how much music means to someone who is one, and what it feels like when you’re a young child playing.

“People tend to think that virtuoso players and those who are the most technically advanced are somehow superior, but I feel like everyone’s relationship with music is individual, and just as not everyone wants the fastest and most proficient ‘million-notes-a-minute’ partner, the music just wants you to be who you are.

“That’s the gist of my book. It’s recounting some of my stories with older musicians throughout the years—with the idea that in the end, when you think about different genres and different ways of relating to music, the similarities are stronger than the differences. Some people define themselves by those differences but there’s a similarity there, and the book is really trying to emphasize that.”

The Penguin Eggs Interview



Ian A. Anderson

Ian Alexander Anderson is something of a roots music institution. Nay, that doesn't do him justice—let's call him a legend. In a 50-plus-year career, he's done everything... beginning as a Brit blues pioneer, he has sung and played guitar in all manner of guises and styles, with a proud and hugely varied back catalogue of recordings to prove it.

But he also took on the mainstream record industry, running his own independent label long before it was commonplace. And along the way he's also proved to be an effective tour promoter, festival organizer, journalist, photographer, designer, publisher, broadcaster, and artist manager.

An early champion of world music, his Hot Vultures duo with his then wife Maggie Holland evolved into a myriad of adventurous projects and collaborations, including the English Country Blues Band, Tiger Moth, and Orchestre Supermoth. After 40 years, the closure in 2019 of his highly respected and influential *fROOTS* magazine provided the opportunity to go back on the road and, in addition to new collaborations in Blue Blokes 3, False Beards, and Not The Anderson Twins, with Alistair Anderson, he did something he hadn't done since he was a wee young scamp—he started playing solo again.

Two recent *Onwards* compilation albums covering the entirety of his long career—entertainingly dubbed as 'deathfolk blues and psych-folk twang'—serve to remind us of his trailblazing energy,

his regular podcasts, and, still daring to dare, his forthright views continue to delight. A man, as they say, you don't meet every day.

Questions by: **Colin Irwin**

If we go right back to the very start, was your family musical?

No. Well, my mother had played the piano. I have virtually no recall of my childhood. Once I got into music when I was about 14, it overtook everything and I didn't think of anything else; I've just sort of forgotten everything! We moved house when I was five or six and initially there was a piano in it. My father hated music—well, he hated practically everything—and he made her get rid of it because he didn't like it as a piece of furniture, and he didn't like the noise. After my father died, my mother found her folder of sheet music hidden away somewhere. So no music at all, other than discovering much later that I have traditional singing ancestors—which was news to me.

So what happened when you were 14 that made you sell your soul to music?

There was a record club at school in the chemistry lab on Friday lunchtimes, and I walked in there one week just as somebody put on a Muddy Waters record—that was my life-changing moment. There

was a coffee house in Weston-Super-Mare near the art college where all the beatniks and what-have-you hung out with beards and banjos. It didn't have a juke box but it had a record player behind the counter and people brought their records in and left them there.

And in the space of a week I heard lots of folk records, blues records, jazz—traditional and bebop—and I even heard my first African record, a Miriam Makeba album. Plus Davy Graham and Lord Buckley. I just went and lived there for the next two or three years. The people there would disappear on Friday and Saturday evenings to the pub across the road, which had a back room, which had a session where anything goes—folk, blues, and a little bit of jazz. I learned to play guitar from watching people.

You just watched?

Well, kind of. There was one guy who could do Big Bill Broonzy pretty well. He was the local guru. I did a summer holiday job in the Littlewoods Cafeteria and bought myself a reasonable acoustic guitar. So I'd watch him, go home and try and work it out, and eventually summoned up the courage to take it into the session and quietly join in.

When did you first start performing on your own?

This would be 1964, maybe. There was a folk club in Weston-Super-Mare; I had no idea that such things existed. The guy who ran it was the local librarian. So, I went there with a friend who played harmonica, and we looked at this room full of people who, in my memory, I categorize as little old ladies knitting. The guests were The Yetties. I thought they were just awful. Big fat blokes with jumpers and piano-accordions and beards—not at that point to my taste at all. All I'd come across was Bob Dylan and Jesse Fuller and Big Bill Broonzy and Davy Graham. They hated us, we hated them—I said I'd never go to a folk club again.

But you did!

Yes, I moved to Bristol in 1965. I left home, and I left school, and there was a girl I fancied. She was going to the Bristol Ballads & Blues Club on a Friday night and implied that if I didn't come, then I wasn't for her. So she took me along to the Ballads and Blues, where the resident was Fred Wedlock and the guest was Tom Paley—and this wasn't The Yetties and little old ladies knitting! It all went on from there.

So you were on your way...

I wasn't a student, but I bluffed my way into the students' union university folk club, and this was the time in 1965-66 when the whole folk boom was happening and lots of Americans were coming over. I went up there every week, watched everybody, and started doing floor spots.

Who inspired you most?

Fred McDowell. I'd heard bottleneck guitar on record but had

no idea what it was. Then I saw him do it, and another lightbulb moment was, 'Ahh, that guitar must be tuned to a chord.' And so I went home and sawed a bit of the landlord's brass curtain rail off, and stayed up all night, and worked out how to play *Highway 51*. I went to the university folk club the next evening, where Phil Ochs was the guest. They gave me the floor spot just before his first set—and I did my *Highway 51*, less than 24 hours later! Miraculously, it went well, and as I walked off through the audience he was coming the other way to come on. And as we passed he said, 'great, man!' I thought, 'What! This is what I'm going to do for my life'.

Was it always blues you were playing at that point?

Well, I was dallying with all sorts of things—Dylan... And I remember that John Renbourn and Dorris Henderson record being a favourite, and I learned things off that. But I pretty soon vanished down the country-blues wormhole. And once I started doing solo gigs in the beginning of '67 it was entirely country-blues. Blind Boy Fuller songs and things like that. But right in the middle of it was a Shel Silverstein song.

Didn't you have a jug band?

The Backwater Jook Band. We got on local television. My first paid gig was actually on the TV—we got paid £75 for six people—a fortune in those days. We had a little residency in a pub in Weston-Super-Mare for about two months and then we split up! Shortly after that, I met Al Jones and so we did the trio called Anderson, Jones, Jackson, which had got fighting fit by the time the Bristol Troubadour opened in 1966. So we were resident there, made an EP and it all went on from there.

That's when you started coming up to London?

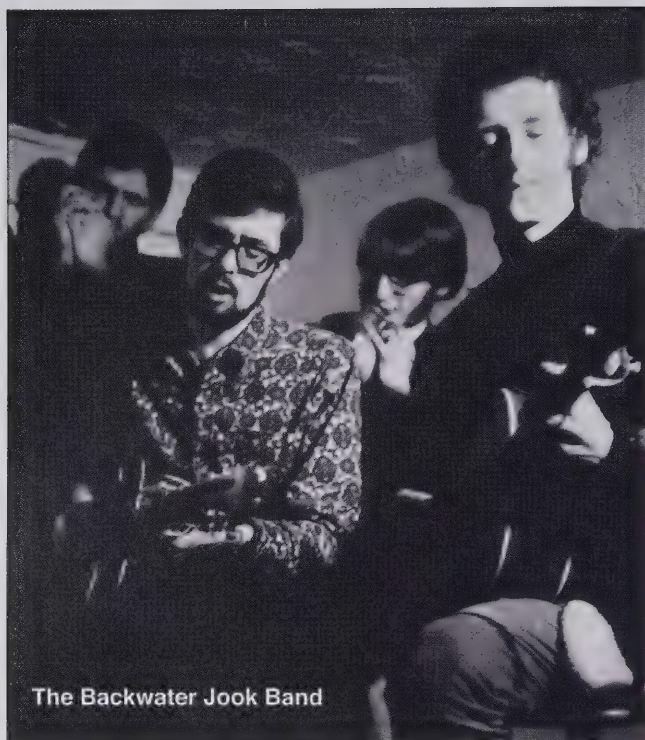
Yeah, me and Al were regularly going up and down to London. There was a kind of invisible piece of string between the Bristol Troubadour and Les Cousins and we used to go there a lot. Spider John Koerner was touring quite regularly and we got to know him quite well. We went to Les Cousins when he was doing an all-nighter and he put me and Al Jones on at 3 o'clock in the morning. It wasn't licensed, which meant that people under 18 could go to it legally. It had an amazing effect on people's lives.

Alexis Korner was a mentor, wasn't he?

In the summer of '68 I moved to London as the whole country-blues boom thing was happening and got a flat in Notting Hill, close to where Alexis Korner was living. Everybody was so helpful back then. He used to do gigs and he'd say, 'Oh, do you wanna come? Keep me company on the ride, put you on a floor spot, you might get a gig.' It was a very good time. People are much more precious about it these days.

This was the British blues boom years...

The John Mayall, Chicken Shack, Fleetwood Mac blues band thing was going on in 1968, but there was also this country-blues



thing alongside it, where people like Joanne Kelly, Dave Kelly, Mike Cooper, and myself were the front runners. So we all got deals with major labels.

Did you think you were heading for stardom?

I was definitely hoping I could make a living at it. I had no real idea what that might mean. If you could live your life making music and with a roof over your head, that would be wonderful—never did it! There was always some fuck-up. My first proper album was going to come out on Island, which was the happening label at the time. I helped organize a tour for Fred McDowell at the beginning of 1969 and the album was going to come out on Island to tie in with this tour. They wanted to do this sampler album called *You Can All Join In*, where their great idea was they get all the artists together in Hyde Park and take like a school photo for the cover.

So what happened?

Great idea, except that point was the one and only time that I met my namesake [flute-playing leader of Jethro Tull], who didn't know I was going to be on Island. Tull's management immediately said, 'You can't have two Ian Andersons on Island Records because it will ruin Tull's chances of becoming the next Beatles.' By then they had had a hit single, so it was a bit of a no-brainer for Island. Bloke playing country-blues with his dodgy haircut and fur coat or pop group with hit single? Which do we keep? So I got the bum's rush. My album came out on Liberty, but unfortunately too late for the McDowell tour. Things like that would always happen. You'd think something was in grasp and whoosh.

Was there any suggestion that you change your name?

No, but I did put the A in the middle. I thought that was probably wise. Also at that time I was reading an unspeakable number of science fiction books, and a lot of the science fiction authors had an initial in the middle.

So have you hated Jethro Tull ever since?

Well, yeah. You would do, wouldn't you? I got to be quite good friends with Mick Abrahams, who left Tull very early on after that first album and formed Blodwyn Pig. I ended up doing a few gigs with Blodwyn Pig, so he and I would sit in the dressing room and he told me how awful my namesake was, and we'd concoct stories about what we'd do to him on a dark night—purely fanciful.

So you decided to become a singer/songwriter instead?

Being a blues player, you suddenly wake up one morning and think, 'Why am I doing this? This is really daft.' People like Al Jones, Keith Christmas, and myself and Michael Chapman were getting heavily into open-tuned guitar noodling, and there was a lot of that going on. I just sort of fell into it. It wasn't that calculated. Then after three or four years I ran out of steam.

So you formed Hot Vultures with Maggie Holland, dumped the fake American accent and sang in your own voice...

When we started Hot Vultures I was more interested in roots music, so that was a nice vehicle. By then I had three or four albums of my own stuff and had evolved a style. This is where people like Shirley Collins come into it. She sang in her normal voice, but nobody else did that, so she sounded weird! But then you suddenly realize it's not weird at all, because if you don't do that, you're acting. With some people it sounds right. Joanne Kelly channelled Memphis Minnie and it sounded absolutely right. Weirdly, when Janis Joplin did it, it still sounded fake. Not the accent, but her acting as an old Black lady.

Did it feel odd to sing in your own voice?

I had to think about it. It took me about a year to not have to think about it. There was a very good folk blues club up in South Shields, and I remember this guy coming up to me and saying, 'Why do you sing blues in a posh voice?' I said, 'It's not posh, that's how people speak in the South. I just sing how I speak.' He'd just done Lead Belly songs in a very gruesome Texas accent, and I said, 'Why do you put on a Texas voice when you sing?' He said, 'What? You think I should sing in a Geordie accent?' I said, 'Give it a go.'

How do you look back on Hot Vultures?

Bonkers fun. We toured and toured and toured from 1973, for six or seven years. An enormous amount of time spent in Europe. I didn't drive then. Maggie was the driver. We had this VW bus and we drove through two engines in that VW bus. Lots of it was good, some of it was absolutely awful. You never knew whether you were

going to get a nice hotel room or sleep in a van in a lay-by. That was the life of a touring musician. Back then, you had to carry your own PA—people these days don't know they're born! Yeah, if you wanted to make sure that you had a good PA you had to get your own. So you had to get to places really early to set it up, and then there would be hours waiting to play, and then knocking it down afterwards. You'd be the first in and last out.

That sort of workload must have been testing for your relationship with Maggie?

Yeah, it's amazing that it lasted as long as it did, and it's even more amazing that we are still friends. I think we lasted until '82 or '83 or something...

How do you look back musically at that time?

Well, here's the thing: there was a point in my life when I thought, 'I don't want to listen to that stuff anymore'; we weren't very good. But then all that stuff started coming up at the start of this century and it got called psych-folk and acid folk, and I thought, 'really?' When I listened to it again I thought, 'I don't know who this person is, neither do I know their motivation or anything like that, but actually it's not bad.'

When I look back at everything I have done, the thing that pleases me most is that it doesn't sound like anyone else. Even where I'm singing in a fake blues accent, the music had already started not sounding like the records I had grown up listening to. I don't mean to put myself in the same breath, but if you listen to the early Rolling Stones records they were trying to do Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley, kinda failed at it, but in the process created something that sounded like the Rolling Stones. Jagger's accent was absolutely appalling, but they had real energy and they believed in what they were doing, and quite early on they started sounding like the Rolling Stones and not like anybody else.

Forming your own independent label, Village Thing, seemed a bold move at the time.

What's that saying? Aerodynamically the bumblebee can't fly, but



Hot Vultures: Maggie Holland & Ian A. Anderson

nobody told the bumblebee that, so it keeps on buzzing around! I'd done two albums for major labels and it wasn't a good experience. My second album for Phillips had the most godawful cover on it. They didn't even show me the photo session, they just picked a photograph—dreadful thing. Awful graphics. I went in and said, 'This is horrible, I don't like this.' And they actually said, 'What's it got to do with you? You're only the artist.' With everything that was going on at the Bristol Troubadour, there was a lot of people who were needing to make records, and we sort of went, 'Well, why don't we just start our own and see how we get on?' And we did. We got on.

Everything punk did when it came along, the folk scene had already done. The music was very different but the attitude was the same. Independent labels, learn three chords and here's a song with meaningful words, with politics and what have you. It was, 'Let's get away from these major labels that don't understand and don't do it very well and see what we can do!'

So you've always had that can-do attitude?

Yeah, well, record labels, festivals, concerts, whatever—my attitude has always been do it properly or don't do it at all. If you want to do something well do it yourself. And it can't be that hard to learn how to do that—which is really stupid because it is. Producing records or learning to produce a magazine or how to program a festival is actually much, much harder than it looks; but if you're pigheaded you learn on the job. And it's much more satisfying to do it yourself. Sometimes you fall on your arse but, you know...

You were a great early champion of world music. Was that another light bulb moment?

No, it was slow. I used to regularly read *Sing Out* and they used



English Country Blues Band with Rod Stradling

to have flexi-discs in the '70s. The first time I heard a kora was Bai Konte, Dembo's father. At the point I decided I would stop being a 65-year-old Mississippi blues singer and start writing my own stuff, I'd been incredibly impressed by Dr Strangely Strange doing something completely different with strange instruments. The Incredible String Band obviously as well. I got into Okinawa music and Tex-Mex in the late '70s and stuff like that, but there was a point when it just became more available. And then eventually WOMAD started up... But it was a slow process.

Our first world music feature in our magazine, I think, was in issue two, which was about a Chinese concert. As the records started coming out we reviewed them, and when tours started happening there were more and more people to interview. There was a bit of a furor when we put Flaco [Jimenez] on the front of *Folk Roots*, but the shit really hit the fan when we did Thomas Mapfumo. Mind you, I didn't help by describing them as 'the best folk rock band on the planet'. It turned over some rocks, but on the other hand I got a lovely postcard from Pete Seeger saying, 'Ahh, Thomas Mapfumo, thank you for the discovery.'

How did Hot Vultures sprout wings and turn into something else?

We started going regularly to Loughborough Festival and around 1980, Roy Harris [the organizer] said, 'I've got an empty room on Sunday lunchtime, do you want to do something?' So we talked to Rod Stradling and the Kirkpatrick's, and we stuck a sign on the door that read 'An English country-blues band?' And we got lots of people to come and play—Nic Jones playing fiddle and all sorts. We just did these amazing sessions. There is a recording of it, where basically Hot Vultures led proceedings doing blues and Jimmie Rodgers songs. Jimmie Rodgers was the link. All the old boys loved Jimmie Rodgers. Walter Pardon, Willy Scott, all those people. The moment we did a Jimmie Rodgers song we were in!

So that was the start of the English Country Blues Band?

Yes. We had this amazing session, and I'm told that it was the talk of the event. We just said to Rod Stradling, 'We should do this, shouldn't we?' It was us and Rod and Sue Harris originally, and then Chris Coe when Sue kept having babies. That was the English Country Blues Band. To me there was nothing weird about it at all. It made complete, total sense. Other people decided it was weird, and adventurous, and out there—no it wasn't.

And then we did the Tiger Moth single and then we did the Tiger Moth album, and then we had to do Tiger Moth gigs! And then we started getting people like Dembo [Konte] & Kausu [Kuyateh] and Flaco [Jimenez] and so on in the studio with us, and by the end of the '80s the magazine had grown to such a beast, and me being muggins the organizer... I just couldn't organize a band and a magazine, and so it quietly petered out. I only played for the fun of it for about 10 or 12 years—didn't do any gigs other than the odd benefit.

Did you miss playing?

I didn't have time to miss it. The magazine had got out of order

and by then I had married Hanitra and I was managing Tarika and they became ridiculously big. I don't think people realize that their albums were all like No. 1 on the world music charts—the European one and the American one, too. They eventually became the biggest pop stars in Madagascar. The one favour that 9/11 did for me was that I didn't have to do that anymore! Plus, we'd split up anyway.

So how did you get back into it?

It was the 50th anniversary of the Sidmouth festival and we were asked to reform Tiger Moth, as they were trying to get all the favourite bands back together. So we said right, OK. After we did Sidmouth, amazingly, we got booked for WOMAD! I never, ever imagined that I would play at a WOMAD. And we did two massive ceilidhs for WOMAD in 2004 and 2006, which I think were probably the best gigs that we ever did because they weren't folkie dancers, it was just a mass WOMAD audience who wanted to have fun.

Then you made an album with Blue Blokes 3...

Ben Mandelson and I were invited to Lewes Folk Club for a night celebrating Shirley Collins getting her MBE and we asked if we could bring Lu Edmonds, who was staying with Ben at the time. So we went and did this trio thing, which didn't have a name, and David Suff, bless him, was in the audience, and said, 'You should make an album.' I said, 'Who'd be stupid enough to put out our album?' He said, 'I will, I'd like you to make an album for Fledgling!'

So we did the record, we did a launch gig, and had so much fun we booked a tour. And then in the middle of the tour, we got a message saying John Lydon was reforming PiL and he wanted Lu back



Blue Blokes 3: L to R: Ben Mandelson, Ian A. Anderson & Lu Edmonds



in the band. So once we finished that tour Lu was back in PiL again, as well as The Mekons. So we only did that one thing.

But you still gigged with Ben Mandelson...

Towards the end of my time in London we were running monthly things at the Green Note, and the last one before I moved back to Bristol we had Tom Paley as featured artist. Ben and I decided to do a duo spot opening for Tom and worked on a few things. Tom had become a bit of a cult figure of young old-time music fans in their lumberjack shirts and backwards baseball hats in their early 20s.

One of them actually came up to me and said, 'Did you make records in the olden days?' I thought it was just like when I went to see the old blues guys in the '60s. I was a teenager and they were in their 60s and they were something other. They came from this unimaginable time long ago. I said to Ben we could milk this! But all the gigs we did from then on were in folk clubs where all the audience were the same age as us. We never cracked that one. But we did our duo thing and decided to make a record. Ben and I tossed names around. I wanted it to be called the False Brides, but Ben insisted that it was called the False Beards. And then I moved to Bristol, so Ben's in London and I'm in Bristol and we stopped. That was 2015 and I really did think that I'd stopped then.

But obviously you hadn't!

I get a phone call one day from Dave Kelly. He and Paul Jones are doing acoustic tours as a duo, and he says, 'Ere, we're doing the Folk House in Bristol, do you wanna come and open for us?' I said, 'Dave, I haven't played solo since 1972!' There was a pause, and then I went, 'yeah, alright.' My instant thought was that I have to scare myself to find out if I can do it. Christ was I scared. I sat down and I worked out all of the songs I had ever done over the years in whatever format—solo blues, Hot Vultures—that I could theoretically work up on my own. I whittled them down. And that was the night I really realized that I sounded like myself. I even started doing some of the things I had written way back. It made sense, and I started enjoying it.

And then you started doing gigs with [concertina king] Alistair

Anderson. Is that something you'd like to continue when things get back to normal?

Well, that was always the plan, and we'd probably have got around to recording something, but it's all gone hasn't it?

Well, for the moment.

Well, I dunno if it is just for the moment. Some people do live streaming, but that doesn't work for me at all. It's a bit like being outside with your cold nose pressed against the glass. I have a horrible feeling that I might have been retired.

Looking back over it all, you must have a sense of pride at what you have done and all the different things that you have achieved?

Yeah, I do. I won't lie. Getting my gold badge [from the English Folk Dance & Song Society] and Shirley [Collins] pinning it on, and the Folk Alliance one, and the Lomax one, makes you realize that you've done OK. You're not just imagining it. It's not just your ego saying you've done stuff properly, it turns out that other people think that you have done a half-decent job as well. I'm very pleased that I managed to quit whilst I was ahead in a number of cases. I didn't exactly quit the magazine, I had it forced upon me, but I seriously think that the last six issues that we did of *fRoots* were the best thing that we did by a mile. I have an instinct for putting stuff together, whether it's radio shows, or podcasts now, or compilation albums, or concerts.

What's your biggest success?

No single thing. There's a lot of those events I put on. Obviously, it was great seeing how well things were received on the Rogue label we put out in the '80s, like the Dembo & Kausu record, and the Baaba Maal and the Mansour Seck album, which was massively successful, and all that stuff. Basically, it is great when people get really enthusiastic and say nice things and play them on the radio. I think that my hit rate has been pretty good, but it does blur after a bit. If you think that my first gig was 1965, that's 55 years ago!

The Penguin Eggs Interview



Grit Laskin

William ‘Grit’ Laskin: now there’s a name to put a smile on any face. A lovely, lovely, modest man. Quick with a daft quip and full of mischief and enthusiasm for all manner of things concerning folk music in this country. He’s a world-renowned guitar maker, who

learned his trade at the feet of the acclaimed Canadian luthier Jean Larrivée; a gifted multi-instrumentalist whom Stan Rogers wisely recruited for three of his five albums; a songwriter of note, too, with four solo albums, and four with his best pals, The Friends of Fiddler’s Green. Pete Seeger thought enough of Laskin’s talents to record one of his songs, as did the Tannahill

Weavers. He co-founded Borealis Records, Canada’s first and foremost folk-only label. In his spare time, he helped get the Canadian Folk Music Awards off the ground. Along with his wife, Judith Laskin, they remain the only two from the original board founded more than 16 years ago. He’s a published author to boot. Not surprisingly, then, he was made a prestigious Member of

the Order of Canada in 2012 for all of his contributions to Canadian culture. Indeed.

Questions by: **Roddy Campbell.**

What attracted you to folk music in the first place?

My big sister went to university and left behind some of her albums. Since nine, I was playing guitar and learning songs from Simon & Garfunkel, and Joni Mitchell, or Beatles' songs, even some Motown stuff I would play with friends at summer camp. Anyway, she left behind *The Weavers Live At Carnegie Hall* (1955) concert and Pete Seeger's *We Shall Overcome* album. I discovered them in her stash of albums and fell in love. I ended up learning every single song on The Weavers album and about half of Pete Seeger's. And boy, did that open my eyes to this whole genre of stuff I had no idea about. I didn't fully understand what public domain was at that point.

The very first album I bought with my own money was The Byrds' *Fifth Dimension*. I was buying it because of *Mr. Spaceman*. Listening to it, there were two traditional ballads on that record [*The Wild Mountain Thyme* and *John Riley*]. *John Riley*, I had never heard anything so beautiful, and such a captivating story. I was about 14 at the time and I was, 'What the hell is this stuff? It's incredible. Where did this stuff come from?'

That was the beginning of my love affair with traditional music, of realizing how centuries, if not decades, of honing the songs as they went from mouth to mouth, and fine-tuning the stories, and the melody, and how the lyrics sound in the melody. It was just mind-blowing for me.

And years later, Pete Seeger would record one of your songs, *The Photographer*.

Yes, I know. You can imagine how excited I was about that. I was in my workshop. I was building guitars by then. I got a call and I was in the middle of gluing, not paying a 100-percent of attention. I pick up and I hear this voice saying, 'This is Pete Seeger.' I said, 'Tam, I'm in the middle of work, stop fooling around and don't bother me.' I thought it was Tam [Kearney] playing a joke. He was pretty good with accents and I

hung up on him.

But [Pete] called back in two minutes and said, 'I don't know who Tam is but I'm not him. I'm Pete Seeger.' Then I started to hear the timbre of the voice. He couldn't see how embarrassed I was. I turned red. He told me Toshi [Pete's wife] had seen the publication of the lyrics in a magazine. It might have been *Come For To Sing* or *Sing Out!*, I can't recall.

She said, 'Pete, you have to learn this song.' He wanted to know if it was OK and he wanted to talk to me personally. Most of the conversation was about how he was still in the middle of cleaning up the Hudson River and I should do the same thing on Lake Ontario. I said, 'Absolutely, will do.' Anything Pete wants.

Were you drawn more to North American traditional music or Anglo-Irish?

Well, it started with American. I was teaching myself banjo and dulcimer. But then I came to Toronto [from Hamilton] as a 17-year old and heard about this club called Fiddler's Green, where anybody, if you called ahead, got to do a few songs. Tam would allow a maximum of four guest sets a night. Two for the first set and two in between. But it was 15 minutes or three songs, whichever came first. So, I came and did a few sets.

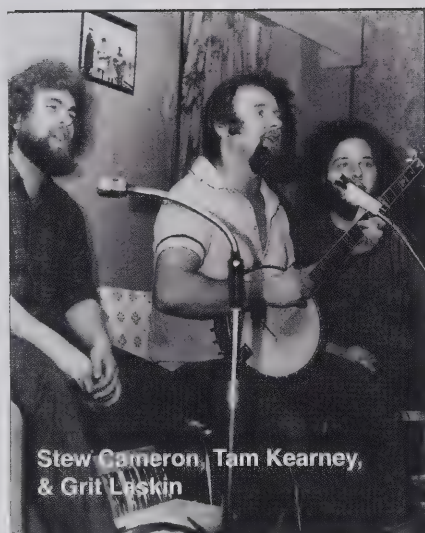
And Tam heard me do stuff that was leaning towards the tradition. I was writing my own stuff, some of it was humorous, and he really liked me and gave me a gig. He gave me a whole night, and after that he asked if I would come along and play for the house band. I said, 'Yeah, OK.' I remember going to the back of his house and meeting The Friends of Fiddler's Green at the time. It was just forming, and he asked me to play guitar on the tunes.

Until then, it was American traditional music I was learning, be it The Weavers, or Woody Guthrie, or traditional fiddle tunes on dulcimer or banjo. But with The Friends I started picking up the mandolin, then started leaning towards the British traditions. And that was when I picked up the concertina, the Northumbrian pipes, tin whistle, and doing more mandolin playing. It sort of evolved that way.

How important was Fiddler's Green for the folk scene in Toronto?

Critical. Absolutely critical. It was the hub of the Toronto folk scene, no question. It was in an old, abandoned, technically condemned house. The club wasn't allowed to use anything above the ground floor, even though we did. Tam kept a Gestetner printing press to print the club's newsletters upstairs. Fiddler's Green was open two nights





a week in those days. It ran two shows, Tuesday and Friday, and in between pretty much everybody else in the folk scene used it to meet. Comhaltas, the traditional Irish music society, the bluegrass folks, the morris dancers, the shape note group, all met there. It really was the place and everybody from Bruce Cockburn, to Flatt and Scruggs, the Georgia Island Singers, all kinds of people, I saw them first at Fiddler's Green.

What happened to it in the end?

After maybe 22 years or so, the building did finally get condemned. It belonged to the Y[MCA]. So the club had to move to the TRANZAC, The Toronto Australia New Zealand Association Club. It's still there. They were doing the odd musical thing, but Tam got onto the board and talked them into letting Fiddler's Green move there, and it did for its last years.

Tam admitted to me he was tired of so many amateur musicians, who were his friends, but he didn't feel they had the capability to do a full night's show. He wouldn't give them gigs and he was getting push-back and was frustrated. It was affecting his friendships: 'You know what, I'm just not going to do this anymore.' So he called it quits. Another club that was running shows out of a downtown hotel moved into the space, The Flying Cloud. It ran there for years.

The Friends of Fiddler's Green kept going, though.

Yes, we're still together and we'll do some more playing even though we were busier in the early years, for sure. Maybe too busy, even though all of us had other day jobs. But things have been winding down. Next year will be 50 years for the band. We'll do something if it's possible to do something live. We're still friends and we've watched members come and go, and pass away, and their kids grow up.

Some of them have become musicians. David Perry, who was in our band, his son Richard is part of Arcade Fire. His daughter, Evalyn Perry, just left her post as an artistic director of a theatre in town. She is also a playwright, an actor, and a songwriter. A lot of talent there. It's been a joy to watch the kids grow up and develop creative chops.

How did you meet Stan Rogers?

He played Fiddler's Green and I got to know him. He saw I was playing a bunch of instruments and I guess he thought, 'One-stop shopping.' He brought me in for his first album to do some studio stuff. I ended up playing on three of his five albums of original material.

What do you remember about making his wonderful live album *Between The Breaks*?

Stan knew I had to work all day. So, the band would come to my workshop at 5:30 p.m. I'd stop and we'd order pizza. We'd cram ourselves into my little workshop and rehearse. That's what we did for a week. The club [The Groaning Board] we played

for six nights. The first three were not recorded. They were considered a rehearsal. And the next three, Paul Mills and Bill Garrett, who were involved in producing it, they picked the best tracks from each night and put them together. On the front cover shot, blurry as it is, the one guy sitting with all the hair, that was me. I was playing concertina and I needed it to rest on my knee. I was the only band member sitting down, which was odd, but there it was.

It must have been hair-raising getting the music right first time?

We were well-rehearsed. There didn't seem to be any difficulties. I mean, Stan and his band, they were professionals; they did so much playing, they rarely made mistakes. It was more thinking, 'You know, I can sing that one even better.' Or, 'This version I liked my voice better.' Or, 'When I take a break, I liked that run better.' Or something. I don't recall mistakes that screwed everything up. It was just exciting and a lot of fun.

How did you wind up as an apprentice guitar maker with Jean Larrivée?

It was just after my 18th birthday. I met Jean at the Mariposa Folk Festival on the [Toronto] islands in July of 1971. I guess he was showing his wares in the craft section for the first time. I had seen one of his guitars at the Toronto Folklore Centre and got blown away by how beautifully made it was. It flipped my brain, 'Wow, a single person could make these. You don't have to



buy a Martin or a Gibson from the factory?"

I was always fascinated by woodworking but never did a lot of it. It really grabbed me, and I thought, 'Wouldn't that be fantastic, blending woodworking with music. What could be better?' I thought as a 17-year old.

So, I met Jean and said, 'Would you ever take on an apprentice?' And much to my shock and amazement, he said, 'When I start up in the fall,' (these were the days before climate-control equipment so you couldn't glue anything in the humid weather or it would fall apart in the winter) 'come on by and we'll give you a try. After three months, if nothing is working out, I'm going to be honest, you're out the door.' I said, 'OK, great.' I was an unpaid apprentice. And what I didn't know, just by fluke, I asked him at that right moment.

Jean Larrivée was taking classical lessons and he couldn't afford a good guitar, but he had met the German guitar maker Edgar Mönch, who was in Canada on a short-term contract building for a music store. He met Mönch and said, 'I'd love one of your guitars but I can't afford it.' Edgar said, 'Well, why don't you come in the evening and I'll show you how to make one.' So after his day job as a licensed mechanic—he lived in the suburbs, had a kid, and was married—he went at night to work with Edgar and learned how to make guitars and got the bug. He decided to make guitars full time.

That ended his marriage. She wanted the suburban lifestyle, she was expecting, and that was when I met him, in the middle of a divorce. He had met Eric Nagler, who was one of the people who started the Toronto Folklore Centre. Eric was a draft dodger and wanted to replicate what was in New York City, the Folklore Centre. So, he started one here and met Jean and told him he could camp out on the third floor, which was empty. Jean was literally sleeping on a piece of foam on a piece of plywood in an empty room, in an old house, which was the Toronto Folklore Centre on Avenue Road.

I met him during that time period and what I didn't know was that Eric was trying to talk Jean into making steel strings and becoming a kind of low-level production shop. Jean didn't know anything about steel strings, but he was saying, 'OK.'

The Folklore Centre was bringing a guy up from the States who had worked at



Mossman Guitars and he was going to do repairs and could work with John halftime. Within two months, it wasn't working. Jean had no idea what he was doing. He was a classical guy. I remember walking in, and he was stringing the first steel guitar and he had the position dots on the wrong frets because he thought they were decorative and not important for musical reasons.

Anyway, within two months the guy they had brought up from the States, Jean said, 'I can't work with you.' Because he hardly did any work. And Jean took me and Wendy, who he was dating at the time and would become his wife, into the shop and said, 'You two are the only ones I get along with, that's going to be it. And for the remainder of two years it was basically me and Jean ... until I left in the summer and opened my own shop. That's a long-winded story, but I am still amazed by the luck and circumstance of the timing. It had nothing to do with my skill, it was just being in the right place at the right time and being game to take advantage.

What do Jean's guitars sell for now?

You could always tell he was going to be a bigger manufacturer. He was somebody who grew up in poverty in the Eastern Townships of Quebec ... So it all made sense when he became a manufacturer ... and doesn't do a lot of the high-end stuff. It's more the middle level so he might have a low-end guitar that sells for \$1,200, I

don't know for sure, or maybe a high end that goes for \$8,000 or \$9,000 and a whole bunch that are in the \$3,000 to \$5,000 range. That's where a company of his size needs to position itself.

How did you get into developing the intricate inlay that you do?

Anybody who builds guitars learns how to cut shell. It's an old tradition and I could teach you in about 10 minutes. You might not be accurate but you'd get the gist, and doing it more you'd get better. There were basic things, bird shapes and stuff like flowers, that we all learned to cut.

But on my own I slowly got interested in pushing the boundaries a little bit and I thought, 'Jeez maybe I should learn to engrave.' I went to a jeweller and bought hand tools that came in many different shapes and different handle grips and started playing with them until I found the one that was perfect. I taught myself how to engrave in shell and stone and I ended up creating a grip-style of my own that I teach now and that gives me more control in my medium versus the way it's done in hand metal engraving. Once you dig a groove, it's pretty deep. And if you make a mistake, putting one in the wrong place, or if your tool slips, you can't just erase it and do another one. You have to sand everything off and start again. You have to be very careful with this stuff.

That was the first step. Then one day I was

sitting eating lunch in my workshop and flipping through an art book on the work of Maxfield Parrish, a well-known American illustrator. I was looking at one of his tongue-in-cheek paintings. These funny-looking servants were attending to their king. All of a sudden, I had this image of one servant walking on to the headstock of the guitar. In that moment my brain stopped seeing the space as an area where there's some decoration, instead seeing it through, almost like the viewfinder of a camera. I'm seeing a portion of the action. And without art training I had to consciously stumble on this concept of limited action, the view gives you visual information so that the brain can complete the picture. So, if I show this guy walking on to a headstock, I've got to show body language like his hand reaching out or his leg stepping a certain way that would indicate he's in motion. And once I did that I thought, 'Gosh, I can do anything.'

I started to see myself as completely unlimited by theme. It's a challenge because I only have that narrow strip to give you all the visual clues to understand fully what's happening. But alongside that came my desire, I guess, to say something with the art, to not just decorate but to consider it my canvas. I try my best to have a narrative arc, especially when it's inlays that go down the whole neck.

In addition to themes, and what objects are being depicted, I really enjoyed using the medium, pushing the boundaries in terms of degree of realism that was once in this medium. I love it when my characters are wearing T-shirts, and jeans, and running shoes, and they all look like models. Or guys with three-piece suits on, I make sure the tie, and the shoes, and the shirt all match. The women all have to wear skirts. 'Will that blouse really go with that skirt?' That's the stuff I love to think about and to inlay in instruments that no one else had bothered to before. What can I say? It really turns my crank. It makes me happy. And I love being in my world. I love music and musicians and I want to make art within the concept of my world of the guitars.

How many guitars do you reckon you've made?

I do know, roughly: a little over 750 at this point that have my label in it, not the ones

I built with Jean. The second year, the two of us finished 60 guitars. I was building half the guitars with Jean and he was very nice. He said, 'You know, you are building half the guitars, you should be signing the labels, too. Of the 60 we made that year, only 12 times did we remember to put my signature on the label before we glued it over the centre strip. Then, it was impossible to write anything on it. These guitars are around and when we are gone they are going to be valuable. I know one of them belongs to Paul Stookey of Peter, Paul & Mary, though I think he beat it up so much he has a new Larrivée he's using in concert.'

You made Stan Rogers's guitars, didn't you?

Oh, yes, and a tenor mandolin.

He had a helping hand in your next adventure, too, Borealis Records.

I remember we were all at Mariposa; he was playing, and the Friends were playing, and we were all talking backstage and he said, 'I'm starting my own label for my music, but I want to expand it, and I want you to be on the label.' I was the first one he asked. I was very honoured. The first two albums [*Unmasked* and *Lila's Jig*] I did were for his Fogarty's Cove Music.

I was not playing music full-time so would only sell so much, but Stan, thankfully, was taking my vinyl albums to sell along with his own. He indulged me. How many would you sell if you were not a touring musician? When he died, his wife didn't want to run a label.

But Ariel [Stan's wife] felt obligated to keep her husband's music alive and she divested the label of anyone else who was on there. There were a few acts, including The Friends of Fiddler's Green.

So, I was on my own and had a new album that I was ready to record. I submitted a demo to an American label that said, 'Grit, we know about you, you've toured down here, we love your music but we're booked up for two years with our releases. Why don't you go to a Canadian folk label?' I had to tell them, 'Well, there isn't any.'

But that got me thinking, 'Why not take \$5,000 from my credit line and manufacture my own albums. Why not get my musical

friends together and we each throw \$5,000 into the pot and do something bigger.' And those friends, of course, were Paul Mills, Bill Garrett, and Ken Whiteley.

We met in my house every Tuesday evening for a year, discussing how we'd structure it, what the deals would be, how could we do better for the musicians and, hopefully, be viable at the same time. That's how Borealis got started. It really was having nowhere to send this new album of mine that became the first release on Borealis.

I notice you have now put your early albums out on vinyl.

Yes, because I still have the originals. I'm trying to get rid of some out of the basement (he laughs).

Back to Borealis, how many records have you put out?

Oh, we're probably up to 175 now. I've lost track but a lot, an average of nine or 10 every year. Yeah, it could be close to 200 by now.

Does any particular recording stand out as a favourite?

No. I can't possibly say. I like too many. Part of the reason for that was we were signing people whose music moved us, and people who we really admired for their integrity, not just their talent as musicians.

And now you've just closed Borealis after 25 years. How come?

We figured that's about the right time. Bill and I are not getting any younger. I'm dealing with some illness things and who knows what the future will be. Our goal was to, hopefully, get some additional investment, bring some younger people in, maybe start a publishing division at first, that maybe we didn't have time for, and then they could be around to take over the company.

But we were stymied finding outside investments. I'll be honest about it, the bulk of what we put out was licensed. We owned a small portion, but mostly we licensed. The artists owned their music, which was important for us, but it also meant when the contract ends, they take their music with

them. The assets you have to sell are no longer in house.

An investor looking long term would say, 'Well, you are only as good as the lengths of all your contracts because these people could potentially leave and there would be nothing to sell.' Whereas, if you owned it outright you could sell it into perpetuity and continue making income.

We would hit this wall all the time until one of our banker friends said, 'You should be looking within your own community, in the record industry.' And we realized we were staring right at the perfect partner. We had been working with Geoff Kulawick, distributing and marketing with him for the last 13 years. Geoff, before he started his own label, Linus Entertainment, worked for EMI and brought La Bottine Souriante to their first label deal. He brought the Leahy Family there, too, so his heart was always with the rootsy stuff. I have to admit, he's a better businessman than we are.

He took over True North when Bernie Finkelstein retired. Whether its Bruce Cockburn or Buffy Sainte-Marie, he's got some great music. So, we ended up talking to him. He's taking over the contracts as of the beginning of the year. The time was right for us to make this move.

You received the Order of Canada in 2012; that must have been pretty special?

Oh, yes. It was quite something. Again, I'm in the shop and I get this call and its, 'Hello, this is so and so from the Governor General's Office related to the Order of Canada. My brain started thinking, 'I wonder who's getting it? Did they put me down as a recommender or something?' I was curious who she was going to say. And she said, 'This call is to say that you have been offered to receive the Order of Canada. Will you accept this offer?' And, of course, I am so shocked my brain goes to humour, needing time to think. I go, 'what are my options? Can I go for the cash?' That's what I said to her. Luckily, she laughed, 'No, no, there's no cash.' I said, 'I was only kidding, you've taken me by surprise, I'm just really shocked and delighted.' I said, 'Yes, of course, I accept.' Twice a year, they take a bunch of honourees to Rideau Hall to go through the ceremonies throughout the weekend. They really make you feel



special. I had to rent a tux for the first time in my life.

You received it for your contributions to folk music or instrument building?

It had to be both. You had to be a leader in your field and, of course, there's lots of innovative things that I've done on guitars that are now part of contemporary guitars. There's that and all of the stuff I do on the side, whether it's starting Borealis, or the folk awards, Running The Woods Camp, books, albums. They look at the whole picture.

Describe the impact of the folk music awards.

It's very measurable if judging by the kind of reactions artists pass along when they tell people they've been nominated, never mind being a recipient. One that stuck in my head was a fella who was nominated for the children's category of the CFMAs, the same category he was nominated for at the ECMAs. He won at the ECMAs that year. A tour operator from the U.K. was there scouting and came up to him and said, 'We really like what you do, interesting stuff, maybe we should talk.' The artist said, 'I guess it's because I just won the ECMA you're interested.' And he said, 'We weren't

even paying attention to that. When we saw you were nominated for the folk award that's when we got interested.' And that was just from the nomination because it was national and juried. We've heard stories like that through the years that are so gratifying.

You and your wife, Judith, are now the only original members left; what do you see for the future of the CFMAs?

We are the last of the founders and we vowed we'd stay on until it was really secure financially. It is getting there. Once we changed the format, where it's more casual, sitting around tables, only nominees performing, not booking expensive performers, and all that stuff, it changed the financial picture. We now have money in the bank, and we've been able to hire a half-time manager, taking some of the work load off. It's almost there. We're really in a good position now. We had to cancel last year, and we did something online. Now with time to plan, we've come up with a bunch of things knowing that it's not going to be possible to run it in a physical location this year. We're hoping when the pandemic eases, we'll make it to P.E.I., finally, and, ultimately to Vancouver, which was the next plan. It's feeling more secure than it's ever been. We are almost at the point where we feel we can leave it in good hands.

Reviews



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The Avett Brothers



The Avett Brothers

The Gleam III (The Third Gleam) (Loma Vista, A Recording Company)

The Avett Brothers' latest release is in sharp contrast to their output as a Grammy-nominated Americana rock'n'folk roots band.

This up-close-and-personal project is the latest in their ongoing *Gleam* series of stripped-down singer/songwriter acoustic folk songs.

Similarly, to *The Gleam* and *The Gleam II*, this eight-song EP features just the trio—brothers Scott and Seth and bassist Bob Crawford.

The tunes are elegantly performed with bare-bones production—guitar, banjo, bass; that's it. You will be excused if you assume this EP emerged from COVID-19 quarantine. It did not. It was finished months

before the world-changing pandemic.

Even so, the songs reflect and address relevant themes touching many of us today: isolation, violence, and prejudice. Thankfully, there's redemption through love, faith, and hope.

Each brother brings his songs to the table, but they emerge as true sibling collaborations in feel and harmony. Who can't relate to Seth's lyric in a song with the self-explanatory title *I Should've Spent The Day With*

My Family: "Turning on my phone was the first mistake I made. My heart sank when I read the first headline."

The other seven songs are highly personal and, at the same time, wrestle with universal ideas that touch us all. Upon release, Seth Avett describes *The Third Gleam* as a collection that is a whisper of an offering in a time of blaring consideration. I suggest it's a whisper that is well timed.

— By Eric Rosenbaum



Laura Smith

As Long As I Am Dreaming (Borealis)

Laura Smith left us too soon in March 2020. Over the years, she produced a body of work that made her distinctive and plaintively beautiful voice familiar around the country. She was working on a retrospective project of her work when she died.

As Long As I Am Dreaming is the result of that work. It includes her classic, stunning, and haunting arrangement of *My Bonnie* and the lovely *I Built a Boat*. There are also two new songs recorded just before Laura died: *On The Road To Glory*, where she is joined vocally by Dave Gunning, and the title track, a lovely piano-accompanied ballad. Both are terrific.

A particularly interesting nostalgic feature in the collec-



Laura Smith

tion is a 1974 recording done at Smale's Pace, the legendary London, ON, coffee house, as well as a couple of late-'70s Toronto demos. The rest is an assortment from her past releases, including the wonderfully jazzy *If I Were A Bell*.

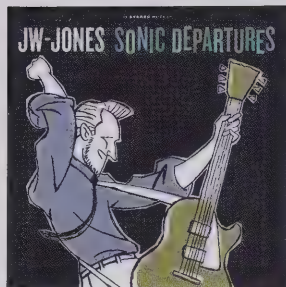
The CD booklet has lyrics, some of Laura's poems, and parts of a visual creative project she called *Dear Merebeth*. As *Long As I Am Dreaming* is a fitting tribute to Laura Smith and her wonderful body of work.

— By les siemieniuk

JW-Jones

Sonic Departures (Solid Blues Records)

JW-Jones keeps it fresh but largely avoiding the expected, hoping to take his fans along for the ride. His guitar-playing has only gotten better—and he started out as exceptional. His singing voice—always short



of magical—has grown into an important secondary instrument, albeit imbued with more of a pop edge than blues or jazz.

Sonic Departures is aptly named. Jones hasn't abandoned the blues but he's underlined them, by clearly shifting his focus towards a jazz direction. By adding 13 horn players into the mix, this too-short, powderkeg of a record swings like a big band in a small town.

The guitar playing is stellar, maintaining his firm grasp on his blues heritage, and the songwriting gets a boost with

three new co-writes offsetting six solid covers.

The addition of so many horns could quickly have become an overblown mess but these arrangements are skin-tight, the players well-defined, and each composition kicks in larger-than-life fashion.

The sound quality on this release, too, is exemplary—despite its COVID-caused challenges. The opening track, chronicling a love affair with a jean jacket, takes a minute to gel but the tight-band sound is front and centre, with thanks to Jesse Whiteley (keys), Will Laurin (drums), and Jacob Clarke (bass).

Jones's guitar solo on this track at the three-minute mark is beyond head-turning. Other highlights include his take on Albert King's *Drowning On Dry Land*, where the laidback

pace sets up a deep, B3-driven groove, punctuated by tight horns, allowing Jones time to dig into the lyric, his solo throwing it to the floor as a sea of horns explode all around him.

Buddy Johnson's big band hit *It's Obdacious* swings hard, as Jones takes a page from Jonny Lang's cover. Not all is bliss; his surprising shake-up of The Everly's *Bye Bye Love* seems an odd fit—it seems more at home in its original country/rockabilly skin than it does as an uptown swing number.

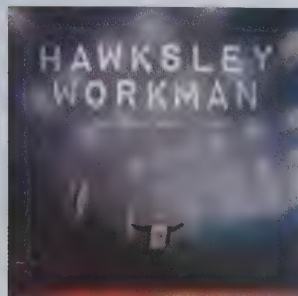
JW seems more at home re-working Stevie Ray Vaughan's *The Things That I Used To Do*, the horns (and Whiteley's piano) adding significant punch beneath his blistering solos.

Yet, credit where credit is due—this refreshing release sounds like a million bucks



and gives off more energy than Hydro One.

— By Eric Thom



Hawksley Workman

Less Rage More Tears (Isadora Records)

Hawksley Workman's records are almost always complex and artsy, with layers and layers to take in over multiple listenings.

In that way, *Less Rage More Tears* is no different. Darker themes and despair rub up against '80s-tinged, danceable pop rock. Dynamic vocals soar over extravagant instrumentation that never feels like too much.

The songs seem to take us on a sonic voyage through time, to Workman's youth with a few "easter eggs" thrown in for the careful listener to appreciate.

And yet, the record feels immediate and contemporary. In spite of being written in 2019, the songs bring up many of the emotions we are all feeling in

2020, when maybe some of us are yearning for the simplicity that was *Good Old Fashioned Acid Rain*.

"Whatever happened to good old-fashioned acid rain? / I miss those simpler times."

In spite of this darkness, there is a warmth to the record that can bring a smile or make you dance a little.

Something we can all use right now.

— By Tanya Corbin

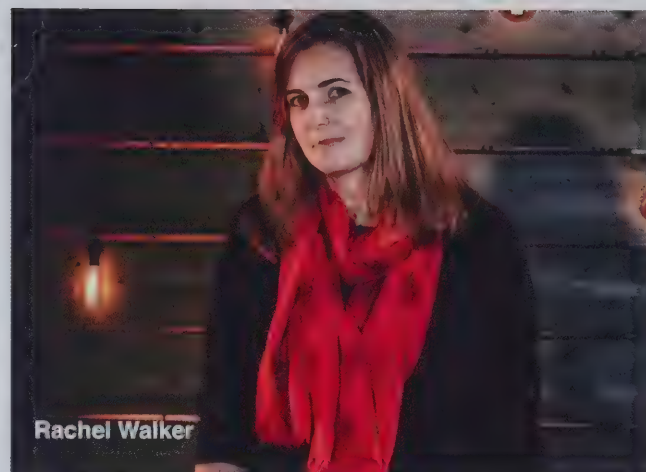


Songhoy Blues

Optimisme (Fat Possum Records)

Optimisme comes roaring out of the blocks with its opener, *Badala*, African metal no less, with pounding percussion and stabbing electric guitar riff over shouted vocals.

Hold on to your hat, you're in for a wild ride with the four young musicians of Songhoy Blues—way out across the plains of contemporary Malian



music.

Though the pace never really slackens, it isn't all a full-on assault, however. The thrilling sound of the band from Bamako includes sweet and lightly dissonant vocal harmonies, handclapping, and intricate guitar work.

And the closing track *Kouma* is lilting and meditative. Of the other tracks, *Fey Fey* is a standout, with its angular rhythmic patterns and a brilliant conversation between guitars.

But there isn't a weak link in the gleaming song chain of *Optimisme*—an album guaranteed to set your COVID-fatigued pulse racing.

— By Tony Montague



Rachel Walker

Gaol (Skipinnish)

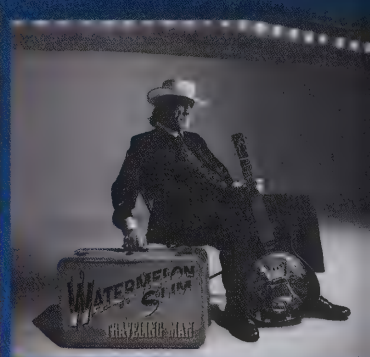
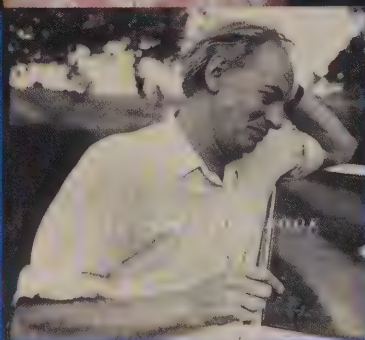
Rachel Walker, a member of Cruinn and Scottish folk super-group Skipinnish, here goes solo with *Gaol (Love)*, a lush and relaxed record of Gaelic and English songs and tunes. There are definitely echoes of early Clannad (and even later Enya) in the carefully architected arrangements and contemporary settings (including drums and synthesizer on some tracks). *Gaol's* theme, as you might have guessed, is love in its many and various forms: from romantic love to love of the land. Standouts include *Là Luain* (a duet with James Graham) and the stirring *Cuimhneachain* (with Jarlath Henderson on uilleann pipes). And of course Walker's voice throughout is the highlight. Classic without being classical, if your folk tastes skew traditional, *Gaol* is one for you.

— By Richard Thornley



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Roddy Campbell... it's been one hell of a ride! All the best!!!



Raye Zaragoza

Woman In Color (Rebel River Records)

We live in a political, polarized world. Ever since my very first coffee house experience so many years ago, I thought the heart and soul of folk music lay in its musical support of the marginalized and victims of injustice.

The likes of Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Dick Gaughan, and Mavis Staples—they sang to, and for, me.

That glorious tradition is upheld ably and vigorously by the relatively new voice of Raye Zaragoza. A young woman raised in New York, steeped in the new-immigrant experience of her Japanese mother and the historical grounding of her father's Indigenous roots, Raye has a keen, artful way with words and stories and an ethereal, angelic voice to passionately sing them.

The songs on her sophomore album, *Woman In Color*, are arranged with a musically en-

chanting sheen of sophistication but are honest and true to the traditions. They deal honestly and directly with the world Raye lives in. From dreaming of being "the it girl", which starts with the observation: "*I could tell I was living in a world / That wasn't made for brown-skinned girls*", to the song *Red*, which deals with the world where Indigenous women disappear without being searched for. In *Change Your Name*, she chronicles her grandparents arriving in America with her mom.

There is not a bad song in this collection but I especially loved *They Say*. Raye confronts what folk music has sometimes been accused of becoming:

"They say that folk music's for the elite / The wise and the old with a college degree / A forty-dollar ticket and a fifteen-dollar drink / They say that folk music's for the elite / They say we're living an American dream / And if you work hard, you will make money / If they say that folk music's for the elite / Well then who's gonna sing for me"

Each of the 10 songs on *Woman In Color* are gems. Some of her words may cut like a knife but they are delivered with an angelic voice that promises hope, and Raye Zaragoza's

voice is one I want to hear a lot more.

— By les siemieniuk



Robbie Banks

The Way My Feet Fall (Independent)

Robbie Banks took his first musical steps and developed a confident stride in Calgary. He began forming a career path and started recording.

His first attempt, *Through February Snow*, was well-received and won him young performer accolades at the Canadian Folk Music Awards five years ago. He moved to Scandinavia, to expand his musical world and sharpen his skills, studying and earning degrees in folk music and dance in Rauland, Norway.

He returned to Toronto in January before the world shut down and recorded his third project, *The Way My Feet Fall*. Five songs born of living in a small town in Norway, delivered impeccably.

Robbie's gentle yet compelling voice draws you in—close and intimate. You find yourself hanging on every word, feeling the tender, intricate pictures. His enchanting, instinctively thoughtful, and rhythmic way with a guitar completes the mood.

Producer Sam Gleason ably adds nice little touches with the electric guitar, some drums, a mandola, and the bass. The two of them play very well together.

Robbie Banks seems to entertain and touch you effortlessly. This is a lovely little release

from an artist who grows musically each time he steps forward.

— By les siemieniuk

(As this is the last issue, I would like to acknowledge Mr. Roddy Campbell's minor miracle of turning Penguin Eggs into the little pot-bellied stove we could huddle around for awhile.)



Katie McNally Trio

Now More Than Ever (Independent)

Boston, MA's Katie McNally grew up on Scottish and Cape Breton music, which was primarily brought to that area by Canadian immigrants.

Her fiddling is accompanied on *Now More Than Ever* by Neil Pearlman on piano and Shauncey Ali on viola.

There's a mixture of original tracks and traditional tunes and, although there are a lot of influences from more contemporary musical styles that creep into the playing, the backbone remains Scottish and Cape Breton traditional music.

There's an obvious chemistry between the players and this comes across strongly, as they weave in and out of one another's playing, decorating, driving, and embellishing the music but never getting in the way of the melody.

Highlights on this fine collection include McNally's own *Worthley Pond*, a beautifully serene air, and the *Compliments to Bob McIntyre*, set with its jaunty melange of Irish, Scots, and Cape Breton styles.

— By Tim Readman



It was everything you needed to know about the world of folk and roots music and you read about it first in **fRoots**. But sadly, after 40 years, we had to suspend publication. Grab the **BACK ISSUES** while stocks last.

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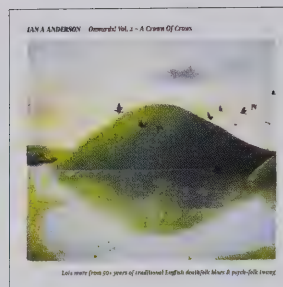
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Ian A. Anderson

Onwards! Volume 2 – A Crown of Crows (Ghosts From The Basement)

Anyone with a taste for British folk will likely know that Ian A. Anderson is no relation to the better-known ‘Tull’ Anderson and is, in fact, the longtime editor of *fRoots*, having also been a blues and folk musician since 1966.

To be fair, his progressive nature helped spawn the genres of trad English death-folk blues, acid-folk, and psych-folk, creating a substantial library from his 50-plus years of putting his money where his mouth was across a wide variety of bands.

The first volume of *Onwards!* was released last January and, pandemics being what they are, time has allowed Anderson to curate this second volume of his work.

Fans of British folk and blues will spark to this eclectic mix, which embraces country blues, bluegrass, and old English tunes—heavy on the strings. Fans of Martin Simpson, Nic Jones, and John Kirkpatrick will find a kindred spirit here.

Songs such as the Hot Vultures’ *Another Normal Day* contrasts Anderson’s somewhat forlorn vocal with uplifting guitar to Maggie Holland’s bass accompaniment (’75).

The aptly named *Stereo Death Breakdown* is a wild

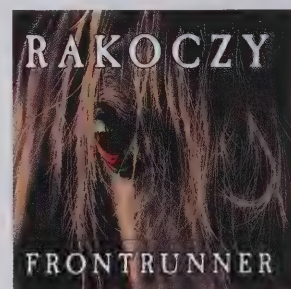
and woolly, fast-played harmonica and guitar wallop from his Country Blues Band period (’68), making you start to wonder who influenced whom in this business of the blues.

City Jail Blues (’85) is a tougher slide guitar, bass, drums, and harp attack while *Pretty Peggy-o* is solo death-folk—a slide-driven blues highlighting Anderson’s solo skills (2017).

As *Silent Night No. 2* from ’74 reveals, this generous, 21-track anthology will appeal to any musical adventurer who craves exploratory, mostly acoustic stringed instrumentation in the evolution of British folk and blues.

For those unfamiliar with these works, you’ll be left wondering why.

– By Eric Thom



Rakoczy

Frontrunner (Talking Cat Recordings)

Meet Rakoczy, a singer, concertina, recorder, and bag-pipe player born in Budapest and based in Manchester. This is a collection of songs about horses ranging all over the paddock in terms of style and content.

Jethro Tull’s *Heavy Horses* nuzzles up next to Phil Martin’s *Hooden Horse*, the traditional *Skewbald* rubs fetlocks with Martin Carthy favourite *Wanton Brown*, and hobby horse song *Poor Old Horse* is left standing by racehorse tribute ditty *Creeping Jane*.

The musical accompaniment is provided by The Horror Show on a wide variety of instruments. This is an eccentric and erratic collection with some strong moments, such as Tucker Zimmerman's *Taoist Tale* (sounding like The Stone Roses' *Waterfall*); the excellent *Little Dun Dee*; the galloping, punky *Dead Horse*; and some weak ones such as the aforementioned *Heavy Horses*.

Perhaps with an external producer to crack the whip, this one coulda been a thoroughbred.

– By Tim Readman



Jez Lowe

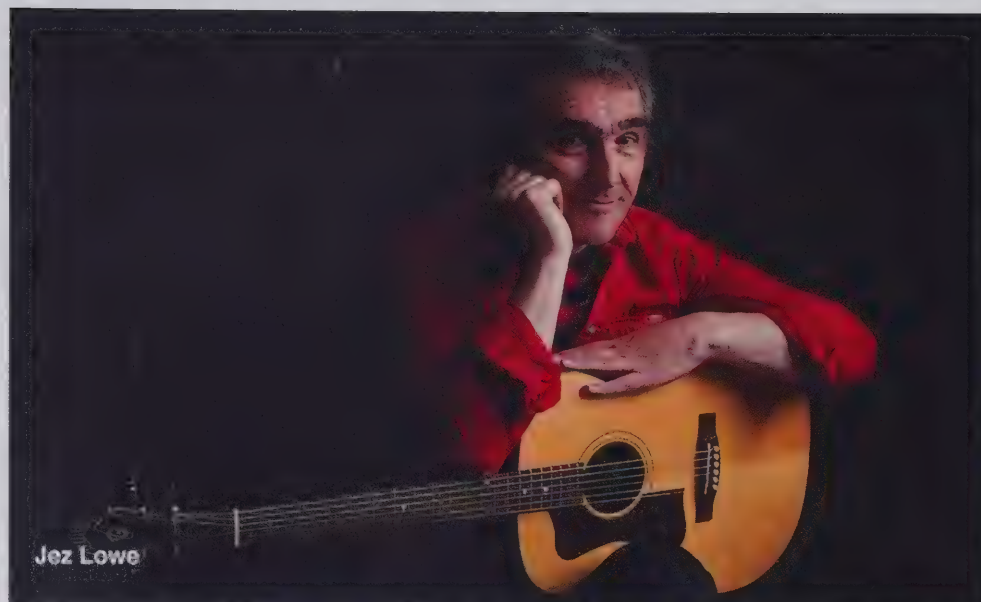
Crazy Pagan (Tantobie Records)

Jez Lowe is the unofficial poet laureate of the northeast of England and for decades he's written and sung stories centred around that historically and culturally rich region.

He's a modest lad but in these times of pandemic, needs must where the devil drives, and so now on this completely solo album he reveals his previously somewhat obscured talents as a multi instrumentalist, playing guitar, cittern, mandolin, bass, banjo, keyboards, accordion, harmonica, whistles, and bodhran.

As you'd expect, the songwriting is first-class and covers vast thematic territory. The album opens with an affectionate tribute to Sunderland football team's legendary FA Cup-winning goalie, Jimmy Montgomery.

There are songs of protest such as *This Is Not My Tribe*



and *Time Rich, Cash Poor*, songs of local life and local history such as *High Handenhold* and *Three Indian Kings*, songs of coal mining such as *Coal Mountain*, and even a 'lockdown sea shanty' *Corly Croons*, which is also the title of his recently published second novel.

There are name checks and sly musical references to heroes such as the aforementioned Monty, The Who's Keith Moon, Jethro Tull's Ian Anderson, and Geordie folksinger Louisa (formerly Louis) Jo Killen.

The comedic *Talk To Me Dirty In Geordie* is a show stopper

and is up there with his best funny songs such as *Vikings* and *It's A Champion Life*.

It's a wonderful collection with impeccable arrangements and great playing and singing throughout.

– By Tim Readman

Shemekia Copeland

Uncivil War (Alligator)

You could argue that the blues has always been political by virtue of its origins and appeal to the downtrodden or disenfranchised, but it's seldom that anyone in blues gets as overtly political as Shemekia Copeland does on much of her stirring



ninth album.

Who better to do so than this proven, potent voice for justice, a blueswoman who pushes the frontiers of the genre.

It's a little strange that most of these songs are credited to her producers, John Hahn and guitarist Will Kimbrough, but there's no mistaking the passion behind them and Copeland covers a lot of ground, starting with Clotilda's *On Fire*, about the last slave ship to hit America in 1859.

Addressing America's great divide on the title track, she asks, "*how long must we fight this uncivil war, the same old wounds we opened before, nobody wins an uncivil war.*"

Other tracks take a more personal narrative to plumb issues such as gun control, religious tolerance, and civil rights, and her searing indictment of how



greed has darkened conditions on this planet, *Money Makes You Ugly*, says it all.

For more traditional tastes, she hasn't forgotten a few love songs: covers of Junior Parker; her late father Johnny Cope-

land; and a hip, spare take of Jagger/Richards's *Under My Thumb*, with a funky tribute to Dr. John to complete the set.

Well-paced tempos run from 4/4 rock to R&B to Americana and many shades

between, nailed by a crack Kimbrough-led band and guests such as Jason Isbell, Jerry Douglas, and Steve Cropper.

How about Shemekia for president in 2024?

— By Roger Levesque

labelled The Devil's Music and the other a deeply religious expression.

A product of the strife of the times, the blues was born of extreme sorrow and loss, to the point of despair, suffered at the hands of extreme racial segregation, if not worse. The church represented hope, redemption, and salvation. Yet, the gap between fans of the blues in a full-to-bursting Saturday night juke joint and those seeking refuge and respite in warm embrace of the church on Sunday morning proves a narrow one indeed.

Many early blues singers came from the church, hymns proving the template for blues songs, given the artful adjustment of a few words. Likewise, gospel music was affected by blues traditions, a practice frowned upon by the pious. Many blues singers of the times



Various Artists

The Rough Guide to Spiritual Blues
Reborn and Remastered (Rough Guides)



Blues and gospel, or spiritual blues, share many of the same origins, which may seem surprising, given that one is

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would record spirituals—going by fictitious names so as not to offend anyone—while taking full advantage of the appetite for both forms.

From the 26 progenitors included here, the blues aficionado will spot those covering both sides of the divide, as both extremes served its audiences by providing varying degrees of healing.

Consider Georgia Tom's (Thomas A. Dorsey) *If You See My Saviour*. Dorsey became the "father of (Black) gospel music" but not before being kicked out of many a church for his marriage of blues rhythms to spiritual lyrics.

The Reverend Gary Davis (*I Am The True Vine*) applied his dancing, ragtime guitar, and raspy voice to the sacred Word. Bessie Smith's tough-singing *Moan, You Moaners* joins Memphis Minnie's *When The Saints Come Marchin' In*, the very rafters shaking in full testimony (for someone rumoured to have only gone to church once).

Guitar evangelists such as Blind Willie Johnson and Rev. Edward W. Clayborn added slide to the blend while Charley Patton's ragged intensity and

celebrity status blurred the lines even farther. Music is an evolution and, just as Ray Charles was pilloried for transforming gospel into soul, these two forms of music were furthered by the influence of one over the other, forever entwined.

– By Eric Thom



The Rheingans Sisters

Receiver (bendigedig)

Fiddlers, singers, and multi-instrumentalists Rowan and Anna Rheingans hail from England's Peak District. Rowan has been active in the English folk scene for years while Anna has studied and settled in France and is an exponent of southern French folk music.

They have also both studied Scandinavian fiddling. This is their fourth album and much of the music has an experimental

feel to it, utilizing unusual tones and eerie drones and unexpected sea shanty *Bully in the Alley*, fiddle session favourites such as *Whisky Before Breakfast* and *St. Anne's Reel*, and original songs written primarily by Jeremy A. Cook (fiddle, viola, mandolin, vocals) and Rob McInnis (banjo, mandolin, cittern, vocals). The rest of the gang are Paul Runnels (bass, vocals) and Ulrich Kroener (guitar, bodhran, banjo, vocals).

Local heroes one and all!

– By Tim Readman



Tyler Childers

Long Violent History (Hickman Holler Records)

Tyler Childers's latest album, *Long Violent History*, taken entirely on its own merits won't necessarily impress. But taken within the context of the year North Americans are living through, its quietly riveting.



Childers is a unique case in the world of country music, someone whose writing is profound, even when he's writing about mundane things. On *Country Squire*, he writes about a trailer he bought on Craigslist. On *Bus Route*, he writes about, well, the bus route he took to grade school.

Were you to listen to his earlier albums from across a room, you'd hear country music. Childers, however, isn't so easily pegged. He's snarky, for one. When he was awarded the Americana Emerging Artist of the Year at the 2018 Americana Music Honors & Awards, he thanked the academy, saying "I feel Americana ain't no part of nothing and is a distraction from the issues... It kind of feels like purgatory." Remember, he was accepting an honour at the Americana Music Awards.

The latest release is a departure from his past work in that it's all fiddle tunes played not entirely expertly. While on tour in 2019, his fiddle player had two fiddles, though one would often go missing. The band would find Childers squirreled away with it somewhere, learning the tunes and techniques of old-time fiddling.

Despite playing for less than a year, he made this album, a fiddle album, taking the lead on all the tracks. It's a tour of the fiddling world, a broad swath of styles, with nods to players



ranging from Tommy Jarrell to John Hartford along the way.

All of that is simply prologue to the last track, the only vocal song included, and which also gives the album its title. In it, Childers meets the discord of the current cultural moment head on. He sings, “*Could you imagine just constantly worrying, kicking and fighting, begging to breathe?*”

Should you doubt the complexity of rural America—Childers is from eastern Kentucky, literally minutes from Butcher Hollow, home to Loretta Lynn—on Oct. 3 it reached No. 1 on *Billboard*’s Americana/Folk chart. In a video released to accompany the release, he sits alone on a chair discussing his intention, which, perhaps he expects, is likely to be misunderstood. Interestingly, it wasn’t. It’s worth all six minutes it takes to watch. The liner essay by Dom Flemons is required reading as well.

Will you love the album? No, but it’s not about love. It’s not pleasant or pretty, and neither is so much of what Childers is reacting to. He’s made this album because he feels it’s something we need to hear, and he’s right.

– By Glen Herbert

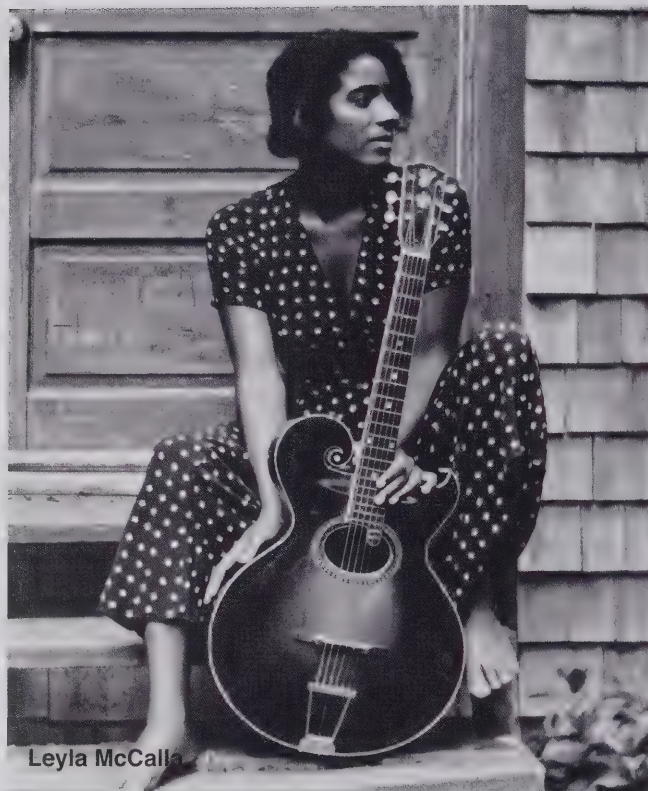


Leyla McCalla

Vari-Colored Songs (Smithsonian Folkways)

If you needed a reminder of how big the world really is—and, these days, who doesn’t—you’ll find it in Leyla McCalla.

Born in New York to Haitian parents, she was cellist for the



Carolina Chocolate Drops and, more recently, joined with Rhiannon Giddens, Amythyst Kiah, and Allison Russell to form Our Native Daughters. Those projects were all born of a desire to make great music while bringing attention to aspects of North American musical culture that had gone unnoticed. They succeeded and then some.

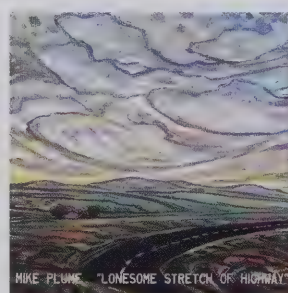
Along the way, McCalla found time to record *Vari-Colored Songs*, re-released this year by Smithsonian Folkways. Over the course of 15 tracks, it surveys the broad cultural landscape that McCalla embodies, ranging from Haitian folksongs to social activism to simply being a citizen of the world.

Inspired by Langston Hughes—it features his poetry and Kurt Weill’s setting of his *Lonely House*, a pandemic anthem if ever there was one—the album has found its true moment.

Says McCalla in a recent interview, “watching the public

discourse really shift about racism and race relations have strengthened my resolve,” to speak “to the heart of these issues in a very graceful way.” And she does.

– By Glen Herbert



Mike Plume

A Lonesome Stretch of Highway (Royalty)

You don’t have a 25-plus-year career without knowing what you are doing—in any path choose.

Maritimer-turned-Albertan Mike Plume chose music and obviously he knows what he is doing. Working out of Edmonton, his latest offering is *A Lonesome Stretch of Highway*,

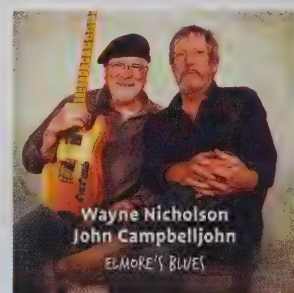
which continues his musical exploration of life in all its facets.

A Lonesome Stretch of Highway is chockablock with really, really good songs. From lovely, bittersweet ballads such as *Perfume and Gasoline* and *The Sweet Passing of Time* to the honky tonk rhythms of *Summers Round Here Don’t Last Forever* and *It’s A Long, Long Way* featuring the gleeful participation of the Road Hammers. I particularly loved the whimsically lilting and accordion-drenched *I’m Your Huckleberry* and the spiritually haunting *In God’s Hands Now*.

Mike Plume, collaborating with his producer Marek David, has crafted a lovely concoction. Put it on and instantly get transported by his gravelly voice and songs. To a highway roadhouse. The sun’s going down. The evening is beginning to sound interesting. You are going to have a great night.

Yup, Mike Plume continues to deliver the musical goods.

– By les siemieniuk



Wayne Nicholson & John Campbelljohn

Elmore’s Blues (Grindstone Records)

It’s so very true that the original works of the post-war bluesmen have been done to death. One more version of *Baby, Please Don’t Go* might send stressed out, homebound, self-isolators over the top. But in the case of this release, there’s more going on than one might expect.

John Campbelljohn, long one



of Canada's most-heralded slide guitarists, has built his musical career out of typical Maritime tenacity and perseverance. His gentle, Clapton-esque vocals have evolved to fit his particular slant on the blues perfectly over time.

Potentially, a one-man-band, this pairing adds Pictou County's most prolific vocalist—having survived the evolution from Nite Cult to Horse, Oakley to Granfalloon and beyond—to create a highly complementary duo.

Oft-compared to Paul Rodgers, Nicholson is equally heralded as the blues-rock voice of choice in the Maritimes. What this marriage has done is free Campbelljohn up to focus on his sizeable guitar strengths while egging Nicholson forward with his road-tested vocal chops, atop some of the best slide guitar there ever was.

What this duo has done is to redefine the Elmore James catalogue while bringing that unmistakable Maritime sound to the party—and it is a party. Especially when mixing in the deft piano of Barry Cooke, longtime Campbelljohn drummer Neil Robertson, plus Bruce Dixon (bass), and Kim Dunn (organ).

Blasting out of the gate with *I May Be Wrong*, putty

in Cooke's hands, Nicholson brings it full-on. Yet it's their reggae-fied treatment of *I Believe* that stands at full attention, Dunn's B3 and Campbelljohn's lethal slide on full display.

They breathe fresh air into *Rollin' and Tumblin'*, as Nicholson's tough vocal is grafted to Campbelljohn's deep-slicing slide, set to the sharp crack of Robertson's snare.

Likewise, *Sunnyland* shows what happens when the tempo slows things down to a dirty boil. Mix in Campbelljohn's understated lap steel and *Strange Kinda Feeling* adds an underbelly of country to Nicholson's elastic pipes.

A brilliant merger, greater than the sum of its parts! Please Lord, let this be Volume One.

— By Eric Thom



Skerryvore

Live Across Scotland (Tyree Records)

This is big, huge, massive, enormous, gargantuan Scottish CELTIC STADIUM ROCK!!!!

Bagpipes skirl, accordions wail, electric guitars scream, fiddle soars, drums and bass thunder, and keyboards splash and spark like lightning.

Large anthemic songs are pounded out with frequent exhortations for audience participation. There's hand clapping and call-and-response choruses, while raucous, salutary greet-

ings such as, "Let's see all those hands in the air, Edinburgh" are yelled.

The spirit of the Highlands and '70s rock music are blended with finely distilled pop, folk, country, and two hundred thousand million billion megatons of energy.

Everybody concerned plays and sings exceptionally well and the production sparkles. It's all done with exemplary verve and commitment and the audiences bloody love it. If that sounds like your cuppa tea then turn it up to 11 and I'll go and put the kettle on!

— By Tim Readman



The John Santos Sextet

The Art of the Descarga (Smithsonian Folkways)

It's unfortunate that, for many Canadians, a knowledge of Afro-Latin jazz begins with Tito Puente and ends with the Buena Vista Social Club. Good (and ubiquitous) as they were, they comprise little more than



a passing glance through a keyhole at an expansive musical tradition.

Where those acts leave off, this album digs in. *Descarga* is music improvised over Cuban themes, bringing in the sounds and rhythms of the region to the sensibility and showmanship of jazz.

Based in his home town of San Francisco, John Santos is at the very top of his game both as a musician and an ambassador for the genre—he has appointments to the faculties of Berkeley's California Jazz Conservatory and San Francisco State University—as are all the musicians assembled here. The sextet includes Orestes Vilató, Jerry González, Orlando (Maraca) Valle, Tito Matos, Juan (Juango) Gutiérrez.

Their performances are precise, exquisitely tasteful, sophisticated and exhilarating. True to Santos's work as an educator, there is more here than meets the untrained ear, as the detailed liner notes attest.

But, for the joy that the music brings, all you need to do is put it on and give yourself over to it. And you absolutely should.

— By Glen Herbert



Dembo Konte & Kausu Kuyateh

Kairaba Jabi (Ghosts From The Basement)

Renowned British musician, chronicler/publisher Ian A. Anderson is re-issuing all manner of recordings from his enormous trove of British folk and blues of the '60s on. And



then along comes this disc, not so much a "remember when", as a "if you missed this the first time, don't miss it this time".

If the presence of a kora in the mix no longer evokes surprise or puzzlement, we can trace that back to these musicians and these recordings. Each artist had toured internationally in the '70s and '80s, and then through their recordings as a duo. Demba and Kausu were much sought after in England, Scotland, and Wales.

Resurfacing now, we can hear how much has changed in our perception of and appetite for the kora, with its just-slightly, not-quite tunings—commanding our hearts, but unfamiliar enough to demand our heads.

Mory Kanté showed us that the kora can rock. Toumani Diabate awed us with his virtuosity, working with Ali Farka, Ketama, and Taj Mahal. Going back to the '80s and '90s with Dembo and Kausu is more like hearing Woody Guthrie or Sonny Terry. They're catchy! They're tuneful! I dig the rockin' rhythms! If I could un-

derstand the language, I'm sure their asides are wry and witty.

The accompanying album notes are wonderful, capturing those magical moments in the Gambia when sitting on the floor in a bare room lit by a single hanging light bulb, waiting for the children to fall asleep, the two kora players settling in and set to with their glorious, idiosyncratically inflected traditional music.

Thanks, too, to Lucy Duran for translations of story lines and insights into stylistic variations, which add so much to our appreciation of the music.

The era of cracking the seal on an unbroken tradition is probably past now. African music has become a regular part of our lives, and traditional musicians are taking the music forward. But here, this album tells a story of roots, of family, of place.

If the words original and raw haven't become tainted with advertising for you, you will be very glad you sought out this album.

— By Lark Clark

Maria Dunn

Joyful Banner Blazing (Distant Whisper Music)



Ms. Maria Dunn's seventh album finds her in fine form and at the top of her game. The title track celebrates the life of her aunt, who worked with disadvantaged youth.

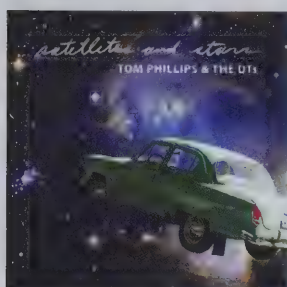
That story is also responsible for the picture of a nun on a motor scooter, which is emblazoned across the cover. That image perfectly encapsulates Dunn's talent for seamlessly blending songs with a social conscience with personal songs about family and relationships, all beautifully sung with sincere wholeheartedness and a twinkling eye.

She has her usual studio team on board. Shannon Johnson ex-

perly produces and plays violin while her brothers Jeremiah and Solon McDade contribute whistle and sax and bass.

Other highlights are Jeremiah's horn arrangements on *Declan's Song* and *Ontario Song*, Jeff Bradshaw's lush pedal steel on *Waltzing With The Angels* and Ron Hynes's *From Dublin With Love* and the haunting Highland bagpipes of Campbell Wallace on *Don't Think You Are Forgotten*. Highly recommended!

— By Tim Readman



Tom Phillips & the DTs

Satellites and Stars (Independent)



Shaye Zadravec

Now and Then (Indelible Music)

One of the joys of living in Calgary these past decades has been the opportunity to experience the amazing creative output of Calgary musicians, such as these two fine examples of musical expressiveness—one from a songwriting veteran and one from a singer just hitting her stride.

First up, Mr. Tom Phillips with *Satellites and Stars*. Through nine releases, I marvel



at his facility with words. I love that words are important in his works. He chooses and then herds them, seemingly without effort, into perfect order in each of his songs.

His latest collection of 10 songs recorded at Studio Bell at the National Music Centre does nothing to dispel those conclusions. Witness the twangy, rockingly beautiful song *Reach*:

"My reach is farther than my grasp / My heart is heart attack / My name is written on a note in a bottle / on the bottom of the ocean / my voice gets on the nerves of the neighbours / they come around and they rattle their sabres / I tell them that's just the way / my song goes."

Tom gets yeoman service from The DTs (Difficult Transitions). They are Tim Leacock, Ian Grant, Geoff Brock, and Shaye and Sydney Zadravec. The DTs with Tom transport you directly to the honky-tonk rooms as they play songs of life's missteps and mistakes, redemption and hope.

I was blown away by *Cross To Bear*, a song about choosing our burdens. *Blue Shadows* is a wonderfully crafted song bringing to life bittersweet memories of Billy Cowsill, who left an indelible mark on the Calgary music scene.

Satellites and Stars is such a lovely piece of work—not a bum song in the bunch.

Which brings us to a member of The DTs, Shaye Zadravec, taking centre stage. *Now and Then* is the title and also the first words you hear from Shaye as she sings Jay Farrar's *Wind-*

fall—and she does a stunning job. Shaye also does amazingly lovely versions of songs by Paul Westerberg, Lynn Miles, Roy Forbes, and Joan Besen.

The album was produced by Goran Grini and recorded in Alberta and Norway. Goran also plays keyboards and is joined by guitarists Russell Broom and fellow DT member Tim Leacock, Mike Lent on bass, fiddler Denis Dufresne, drummer Chris Norquist, and Shaye's sister Sydney providing backing vocal support. They do a wonderful job of gently and tastefully sup-

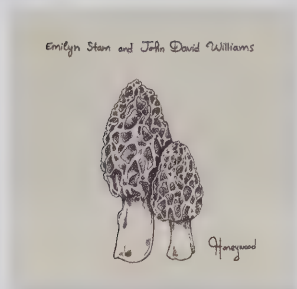


porting Shaye's lovely, lovely vocal performances.

Shaye beautifully evokes all the homesick emotion of Jesse Winchester's *Biloxi*, included because her dad likes it. It is one of the best versions I have heard. Another highlight on this recording is her touching duet with Ian Tyson on his *Silver Bell*, a song for Christmas.

Shaye Zadravac, she's a good 'un. So sit back, put on the headphones, and let her gorgeous voice wash over you.

— By les siemieniuk



Emilyn Stam & John David Williams

Honeywood (Independent)

Fiddler, pianist, and accordionist Stam and clarinetist/accordionist Williams met while playing with the wildly eclectic Balkan-Klezmer-Gypsy band Lemon Bucket Orchestra.

Together they have composed and collected this set of tunes in the tradition of BalFolk, a European event for folk dance and music.

Honeywood is the rural Ontario location where they have held their own BalFolk festival for several years.

Also featured on this recording are several friends and musical accomplices on bass, accordion, fiddle, banjo, and mandolin.

There are all manner of folk dances here—schottisches, waltzes, mazurkas, and more—all played with an exuberance and swing to drive the dancers



on.

It's fun to sit back and listen too, but to get the full effect I'd recommend you roll up the rug and get on your feet. It's all you need for a lockdown BalFolk dance party!

— By Tim Readman



Logan & Nathan

The Happening (Fallen Tree Records)

Remaining quirky and somewhat indefinable, Logan & Nathan return on their second full-length record with Edmonton's Fallen Tree Records. The intimate and laid back feeling of the album wraps you up like a cozy blanket, while the lyrics pose some serious questions along the way.

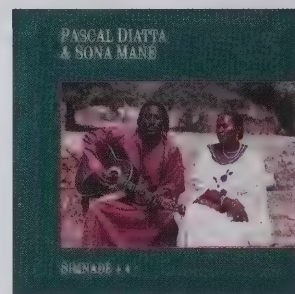
Logan Thackray's dreamy vocals draw us into a world slightly off-kilter but an "intentional look at the present" that is a timely commentary on

relationships, politics, climate, and Indigenous rights. This is most obvious in their collaboration with Rex Smallboy of the Neyaskweyahk (Ermineskin) Cree Nation, who co-wrote and raps on *Where Do We Go*—a song that grew from the couple's time in Northern Quebec, in Eeyou Ischtee, as they were working with youth in the region for the non-profit organization Youth Fusion.

Nathan Turner's production keeps the album cohesive and nicely fleshes out the record.

Another solid outing that is thoroughly enjoyable to groove along with.

— By Tanya Corbin



Pascal Diatta & Sona Mané

Simnadé + 4 (Ghosts From The Basement)

The CD cover photo shows an elegant man looking directly at the camera, guitar in hand. His wife turns her head and looks indirectly at the lens. A strong aura of dignity surrounds them both. The calm regard of



the photo gives no clue of the torrent of music unleashed on the tracks.

The couple is Pascal Diatta and Sona Mané, recorded in Casamance, Senegal, in 1988. First released on vinyl and cassette, the album elicited extravagant praise.

Legendary in Senegal, yet elusive to recording pioneers Lucy Duran and Ian Anderson, his second treasure hunt to Senegal that finally resulted in connecting with Pascal Diatta.

Overcoming obstacles ranging from driving illegal vehicles and police stops requiring liberal applications of cash, Ian finally pulls up in Casamance in southern Senegal and by sheer good fortune locates Pascal at the local radio station.

Once burned, twice shy. Pascal has recorded for an American who promised much but delivered little and is thus ill-disposed to record with Ian. But his travelling companion, kora player Dembo Konte, vouches for the genuine connections in England awaiting an accomplished musician. Setting up a recorder and a mic back in the hotel room, the long-awaited rendezvous finally unfolds.

An outburst of complex finger picking and boldly delivered vocals, duets in harmony, and driving guitar runs create a perfect storm of surprise and delight.

Anderson records 90 minutes of material. The tapes from that “awe-inspiring night” (Anderson) make it onto an LP in 1989 and later onto a CD entitled *Simnadé* (*Listen*). Attempts to bring Pascal to perform at British festivals fizzle out—he has simply vanished on his travels!

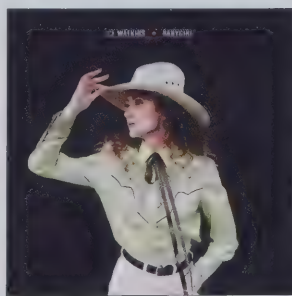
Today this magical recording is being re-released by Anderson’s Ghost In The Basement project. For the last 10 years, Ghosts had been releasing



alternative folk from Britain’s explosive music scene of the ’60s, ’70s and ’80s, including Ian Anderson’s vast trove of his own recordings with artists such as Maggie Holland.

Legendary guitarist Pascal Diatta has now joined his friend, kora player Dembo Konte, rising from the Basement with belated honours. Lest we forget.

— By Lark Clark



CF Watkins

Baby Girl (Whatever’s Clever Records)

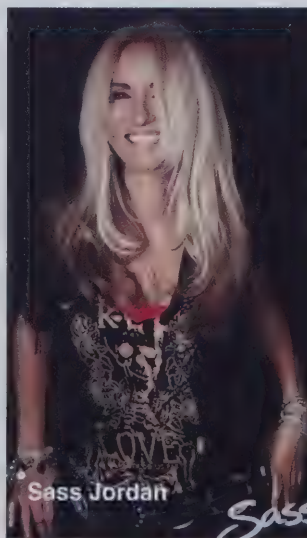
The cover of CF Watkins’s new album, *Babygirl*, might create expectations of some jangly country twang but don’t judge a book by its cover. This is a solid album of strong songwriting that leaves behind the typical romance and love-gone-wrong songs and embraces the strength of female friendships and longings for family and home.

An inviting mix of southern

charm and urban ideas, rootsy singer/songwriter and, yes, maybe a touch of twang in the right places, the record is comfortable and comforting to listen to in its entirety.

Max Hart (War on Drugs, Katy Perry, Melissa Etheridge) contributes both as producer and as much of her “band”, filling out the songs on any number of instruments to compliment Watkins’s songwriting. With jazz vocal style that sometimes elicits comparisons to Joni Mitchell—some songs also give hints of Jane Siberry—this record showcases the best of CF Watkins as a songwriter and as a performer.

— By Tanya Corbin



Sass Jordan

Rebel Moon Blues (Stony Plain)

At 57 years of age, it could be easily said that Sass’s rebel days might be far behind her. However, this eight-track love song to the blues leaves no doubt that there’s still plenty of piss’n’vinegar in her approach.

Blessed with the good sense to surround herself with quality players, Sass has cherry picked a varied collection of new and old blues, plus an original, *The Key* (co-written with writer/producer, Hill Kourkoutis).

Standing way out on harp is Monkeyjunk’s Steve Marriner who, together with Jordan’s own Champagne Hookers—Chris Cadell (guitar, slide, Dobro), Jimmy Reid (guitar), Derrick Brady (bass), and Cassius Periera (drums), plus Jesse O’Brien (keys)—transform each song into grinding rock-blues that plays to Jordan’s well-known, sultry rasp of a voice.

Sleepy John Estes’s *Leaving Trunk* is a highlight, wasting no time in justifying her choice of covers. The overly overdone *My Babe* gets fresh legs, given Jordan’s female perspective, but it’s the infectious guitar line on Keb’ Mo’s rudimentary *Am I Wrong* that ups the ante.

Given Jordan’s strong vocal, accompanied by little more than guitar and hand-claps, offers further proof of Jordan’s ability to sing these blues.

Likewise, Elmore James’s *One Way Out* follows the Allman version closely as the squall breaking out between Marriner and Cadell’s excep-

tional slide helps lift what could have been a disaster into being a strong contender.

Freddie King's *Palace of the King* plays a little on the light side, despite Cadell's strong lead guitar and sturdy backup chorus, if only because it's shy on the energy it deserves.

The Key seems slightly out-of-place, coming off like a generic rock ballad, while J.B. Hutto's *Too Much Alcohol* shines bright, and made fully believable, as Jordan testifies with absolute passion and a devilish laugh, while Cadell turns in yet another brilliant performance on guitar.

Likewise, on what seems more of a personal tribute to a fallen artist, Gary Moore's *Still Got The Blues* gets the album's gold star, as Jordan works harder and digs deeper on this slower number, which seems to reveal where her heart really lies.

This is no mere dip into the blues by 'a former Juno winner'. Jordan's got some pain and is skilled at lending these well-chosen tracks her sincere intention. Wish it lasted longer...However, here's hoping there'll be more to come.
— By Eric Thom

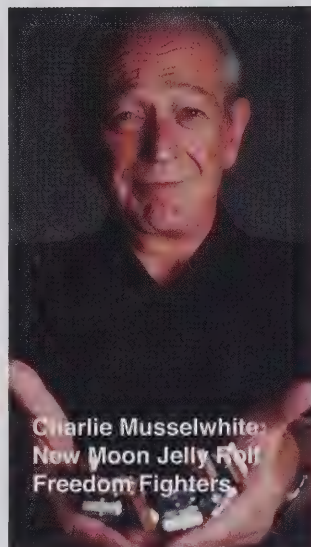


New Moon Jelly Roll Freedom Fighters

Volume 1 (Stony Plain)

This record was birthed in 2007, when brothers Luther and Cody Dickinson were touring as the house band for Mavis Staples and Charlie Musselwhite.

Hitting it off, Charlie and



the brothers moved into the Dickinson family studio—Zebra Ranch—where Charlie met the boys' legendary father, as Alvin Youngblood Hart and Jimbo Mathus (Squirrel Nut Zippers) were added to the recording roster—and the party began in earnest.

Largely improvised, the tracks chosen fell together like impromptu requests at any gig. Hendrix's *Stone Free*, Musselwhite's own *Strange Land*, and Canned Heat's *Let's Work Together* were cherry picked with an overt intention of leaning towards the more psychedelic, and less traditional, side of the blues.

This project features the

senior Dickinson's last recorded contribution but, not surprisingly, the recording was largely shelved after his death in '09, never finding a proper home.

Given the opportunity to release it, Stony Plain's Holger Petersen jumped at the chance. Please do not expect the tight, refined performance that you might expect from this seasoned, esteemed assembly. It's an extremely laidback, impromptu affair, not unlike a house party—unencumbered by the usual pressures of the typical, time-is-money session.

Starting off strong with Musselwhite's own *Blues, Why You Worry Me*, the feel-good chemistry is palpable, if not passionate amongst all the players, including NMA's own Chris Chew (bass) and Paul Taylor (bass/tuba).

There's an element of funk to Jimbo Mathus's *Night Time*, swaddled in percussion, Dickinson Sr.'s piano, and Musselwhite's prolific harp as Luther's guitar brings it all together.

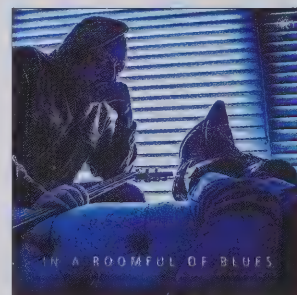
Jim Dickinson's lead vocal on *Come On Down To My House* almost steals the show, as son Luther bathes his father's 'better-than-loosey-goosey' ragtime piano in fiddle and mandolin, ghosted by Musselwhite's spiralling harp runs, conjuring a

deeply intimate groove.

From Hart's more traditional take on Charley Patton's *Pony Blues* and a surprisingly dirge-like treatment of Canned Heat's *Let's Work Together* to the over-the-top grind of Hendrix's *Stone Free*, there's something for everyone here.

Musselwhite's fans will savour his revisiting of *Strange Land* (from his '67 debut) and the jam that erupts. An unexpected release, exceptionally unpolished, entirely raw, and ultimately endearing. Stay tuned for Volume 2 next spring.

— By Eric Thom



Roomful Of Blues

In A Roomful Of Blues (Alligator Records)

More institution than band, fans of intensely swinging big band sounds are already praying at Roomful's church. And since this church has been open since 1967—acting as virtual farm team for a *Who's Who* of blues legends—it's reassuring to real-





ize that this, their 23rd release, is as solid as anything they've done.

Their first release of originals in nine years, be reassured that the songwriting is beyond top-notch, guitarist/producer Chris Vachon responsible for eight of 10 originals, rounded out by three sturdy covers.

From the powerful lead vocals of Phil Pemberton, Vachon's guitar strengths and the phenomenally slick three-man horn section that sounds like five, there's much to fall in love with here.

If the opening salvo of Johnny Ace's *What Can I Do?* doesn't get you with its powerful punch of high-end uptown energy, then the slightly off-kilter *Phone Zombies* will. Laid out with energetic precision and featuring the rock-solid bedrock provided by Rusty Scott's B3, it also underlines the understated importance of Vachon's role as guitarist as the song's humorous lyrics poke fun at a sad reality.

The horns are sublime, so good they sometimes run the risk of sanitizing the product. But listen how they drive the highly quirky *We'd Have A Love Sublime* into rocking

overdrive.

Extra points for Pemberton Boz Scaggs-ing his way through the slow, sultry *Carcinoma Blues*. Something for everybody and a blues party you don't dare miss.

— By Eric Thom



Rick Fines

Solar Powered Too (Independent)

With all this concern about climate change, Rick Fines is doing his part. The release of the second volume of his solar-powered series shows he's still in full command of his smooth, whisky-poured-over-gravel vocals—a voice that has aged with grace.

Recorded (mostly) using the power of the sun from his northern hideaway—we're treated to his usual high standards—11 originals spanning rootsy folk and soulful blues (including co-writes with Matt Anderson,

Grainne Ryan, P.J. Thomas) plus an infectious cover of a Jesse Winchester classic.

Fines's popularity is measured from sea to shining sea and the warmth he generates with his music is only accentuated here by the power of the sun itself.

Rick blends elements of folk and blues, yet his songwriting defies easy classification—and that's his preference. His guitar playing plays an equal part in his performance and his weapon of choice here is primarily National steel, his fingerstyle work as aggressively expert as the rich embrace of his big voice.

A good starting point is *Below The Surface*, wherein he takes the pulse of the nation, his baritone guitar ringing like a healing salve.

From the deep blues of *Worry Be The Death Of Me*, deepened further by the accompaniment of Roly Platt's harp and driven by Fines's dangerously dark National Steel slide, to an even darker blues detour with Platt and Fines's own *Dark Days*.

However, it's Fines's *Laundry on the Line* that plays to his greatest strengths. Life—as a struggle and uphill battle—benefits greatly from his gentle vocal touch and poignant guitar.

Jimmy Bowskill's mandola adds buoyancy to Winchester's magical *That's What Makes You Strong*, Fines's vocal melding

with guest Melissa Payne's to rejuvenate this upbeat singalong tune.

Alec Fraser's cigar box bass and percussion joins Fines's natural drawl on the party-starting *Live Forever*, while the slinky, barrelhouse feel of *You Only Want Me When You Need Me* (co-written with Matt Andersen) benefits from Gary Craig's fat, percussive sound, Rob Phillips's rollicking piano, and a well-backed chorus.

Bowskill's pedal steel injects the gentle *One More Loon* with a mournful backdrop while *Scared To Death* is the time-honoured Fines composition—one man striving to add positivity to the world, with nothing but hugs for those around him. Thank you, Mr. Sun.

— By Eric Thom



Ross Ainslie

Vanna (Great White Records)

Scottish piper, whistle, and cittern player Ross Ainslie has one foot firmly planted in



traditional music and the other in more eclectic territory.

He has played with the likes of Treacherous Orchestra, Salsa Celtica, Dougie Maclean, Ali Hutton, and Jarlath Henderson. This is his fourth solo album and it includes self-composed material reflecting many aspects of his musical experience.

There's a jazz influence in the tracks featuring saxophonist Paul Towndrow, such as *Absinthe In Aranya*. There's a strong presence of traditional Highland piping, including an appearance by John Wilson on canntaireachd on *Wisdom in the Chaos*, which then segues into a full-on Celtic rock work out of the same melody with Runrig guitarist Malcolm Jones giving it some welly!

Science Of Life starts with a chill-out vibe before opening out into a jazzy groove underpinned by the nimble banjo of Damien O'Kane.

Splendid stuff!

– By Tim Readman



The Fugitives

Trench Songs (Independent)

This album forms the musical content for *Ridge*, a performance documentary about the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

Originally conceived as a monologue to be performed by band member and renowned slam poet Brendan McLeod, it was repurposed due to the pandemic into a film, which is now available on the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts website, where it would have



been staged.

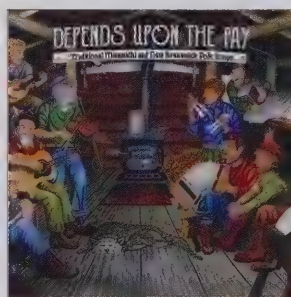
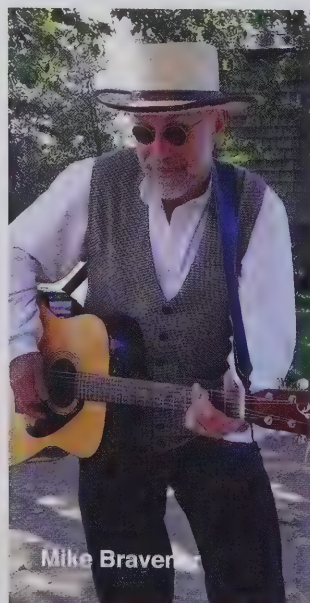
Trench songs were written by frontline soldiers during the First World War, often using popular tunes of the day for their melody. Here they are re-imagined by the The Fugitives through a more Americana-tinged lens.

Their brutal humour and baleful resignation to the horrors and degradations of warfare come through loud and clear. McCleod has done his home-

work and makes a strong case for this significant part of Canadian history to be subjected to close re-examination.

To get the full effect, I strongly recommend you head online and take in the whole production. It's well worth the effort.

– By Tim Readman



Mike Bravener

Depends Upon the Pay: Traditional Miramichi and New Brunswick Folk Songs (Independent)

Our esteemed editor sent an album of folk songs from New Brunswick for this edition of *Penguin Eggs*. Nice. OK, not a lot of New Brunswick songs spring to mind. Seems Nova Scotia and P.E.I. have a higher musical profile.

It is compiled and researched by a gentleman named Mike

Bravener. He came to folk music recently via stints in other musical genres, including time as an Elvis tribute artist (recognized by Elvis Presley Enterprises as one of their top 20 artists in the world).

This collection has sad stories (*Peter Emmerly*, *The Miramichi Fire*), and rollicking versions of *The Banks of the Miramichi* and the *New Brunswick Waltz*.

In this collection, Mr. Bravener takes a pretty traditional musical approach to the songs and they are delivered with gusto and respect.

I was especially taken with a short song of unknown origin that told a complete sad story in just 24 seconds.

"Oh, the Jones Boys / They built a mill on the side of a hill / And they worked all night and they worked all day / But they couldn't make the gosh-darned sawmill pay."

So, folk songs from New Brunswick... All in all, an enjoyable experience, Mr. Bravener.

– By les siemieniuk



Various Artists

Big Turnips Vol. 2 (Big Turnip Records)

Dartmouth, Nova Scotia's Dylan Jewers started Big Turnips as a project to revitalize traditional folk music. He was inspired by the work of folklorist Helen Creighton, who spent most of her life in Dartmouth.

Most of the tracks have the performer doing a spoken introduction describing their song or tune. The result is a wildly varied compilation of traditionals and standards from Scotland, England, Ireland, Iran, Ghana, U.S.A., and Atlantic Canada.

Among the highlights are *Three Crows/Three Ravens* by fiddler/singer David Bradshaw, *A Maid I Am In Love* by singer Amy Lou Keeler, *Two Reels* by Kevin Dugas, and Ama Asubonteng's Ghanaian folk songs *Dendende Kwaaye* and *Mo Ma Abena Nko Ndi*.

My only quibble is that I can't figure out the criteria for selecting these particular pieces or any kind of curatorial focus. Nonetheless, this is a very enjoyable, if somewhat random, collection.

— By Tim Readman



Wide Mouth Mason

I Wanna Go With You (Independent)

For those who choose to remember, Wide Mouth Mason has been around since '97's self-titled release, earning the creative threesome proof that Saskatoon offered more than potash.

With this, their eighth release, you can't help but wonder why they didn't become more household than they are. With no shortage of talent and some exceptional songwriting, guitarist/singer Shaun Verreault,

drummer Safwan Javed, and bassist Earl Pereira scored a consistent presence across the CanCon network. Listening to *I Wanna Go With You*, however, makes you think that now could be their time.

Never really professing to be a full-fledged blues band, their roots were clearly influenced by blues. Yet their playing and vocal style seemed to sway closer to the rock-pop sounds of their Canadian contemporaries. However, they're raising the blues flag now and it is the basis for their sound, thanks largely to Verreault's inventive technique of playing 'threestyle' (playing resonator/Dobro and electric lap steel simultaneously to darkly stunning effect).

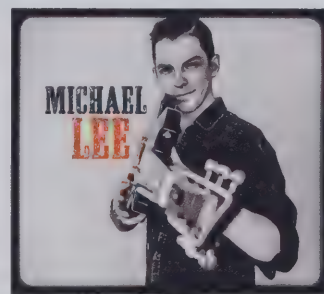
At the same time, Verreault's highly elastic voice reveals both bluesman and rock-pop singer, so there's still that distinctive Wide Mouth Mason sound across most of the dozen tracks.

Standouts abound, from the lovely paced, acoustic-driven *Every Red Light* and invigorating harmonies to the extremely pop-flavoured *Anywhere*, defying you to not sing along.

The harder-edged *Only Child* benefits from aggressive slabs of slide guitar and Verreault's muscular, blues-rock vocal.

Stay For A Couple More paints a slinky, down'n' dirty picture while the closing track, *You Get Used To It*, sits atop gentle acoustic guitar, eventually building to an epic chorus that makes for one of the greatest songs you've never heard before, but should. Full of tasteful surprises, don't let this pass you by.

— By Eric Thom



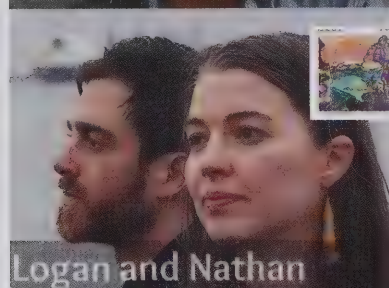
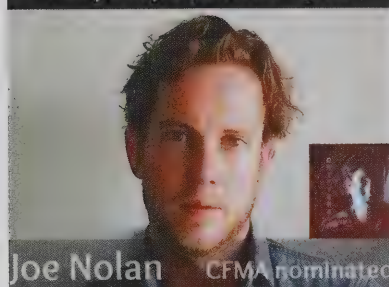
Michael Lee

Michael Lee (Ruf Records)

Michael Lee has been marketed, of late, as a hot Texas guitarist but he's clearly got another remarkable gift: his singing voice.

You might recognize the name—he's featured on the first B.B. King Blues Band release (notably reinventing B.B.'s legendary *The Thrill Is Gone*) and competed (briefly) on NBC's *The Voice*. But don't let that put you off.

Roddy and Penguin Eggs: You will be missed.
Thank you for your years of all things folk



hear these artists along with Vivienne Wilder, Jay Aymar and Jessica Heine at
fallentreerecords.co
rooted in Edmonton

His talents eclipse that sterile showcase and, authoring 10 of these 11 songs, adds 'exceptional songwriter' to his CV. Ruf spared no expense, production-wise—with full horn sections and fully fleshed-out arrangements—to showcase their young star. These horns, together with Colin Campbell's B3, enrich the otherwise plodding opening track, its distorted rock edge lifted by Lee's intermittent flashes of lead guitar.

The tasteful, gospel-tinged *Don't Leave Me* might seem to slow things down before the party starts, yet everything's beginning to gel as uncredited backup singers help underline, if not help define, the soulful edge of their lead singer.

Despite Lee's diminutive size, he's got an older-sounding, R&B-flavoured voice, recalling McClinton and Hinton. By *Love Her*, his distinctive voice has sunk in its teeth, fully throwing open the door on his potential.

His hard take on B.B.'s *The Thrill Is Gone* might raise a few eyebrows but the focus should fall on Lee's ability to wrangle his guitar like a tortured banshee and for tackling a revered classic with unbridled imagination.

Joined by exceptional musicians in Campbell, Scott Lee (bass), and drummer Blaine Crew, Lee explodes on soul-rich tracks such as the stunning *This Is* and the near-epic *Fool of Oz*.

The gentle gospel prodding of *Here I Am* reveals control over his softer side. Unfortunately, the closing *Go Your Own Way* proves the least interesting of all that preceded it, yet notice has been served. Lee's next release should be something to jump on.

— By Eric Thom



Dâvi Simard

Violoneux (Independent)

Dâvi Simard's new album, soberly titled *Violoneux* (*Fiddler*), was anticipated by many traditional Québécois music aficionados.

Known for his fruitful collaboration with Cirque Alfonse, Simard delivers 15 tunes and songs from the Québécois and Acadian traditional repertoire. Behind the sepia tone of the cover, we get a glimpse at the now-distant figure of 20th century tradition bearers, the figure we now thank for passing down a repertoire that nourishes contemporary folklore.

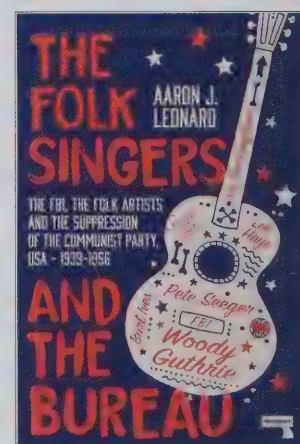
In invoking this image, Simard transforms the "violoneux" into a multi-instrumentalist, a singer of laments, an arranger, and a sound engineer. Simard surrounds himself with some of the most established Québécois traditional musicians, choosing

larger ensembles for certain tracks, while in others preferring the intimacy of a duo, notably for a song he shares with fiddler Stéphanie Lépine, and for two reels with David Boulanger.

In the two solo fiddle tracks, rare and precise versions of *Reel du Pendu* and *Disputeuse*, which are accompanied only by the constant tapping of his feet, Dâvi Simard reaches the core of the practice of the fiddlers who have inspired him. It's an album of subtle and refined richness.

— By Alexis Chartrand

Books



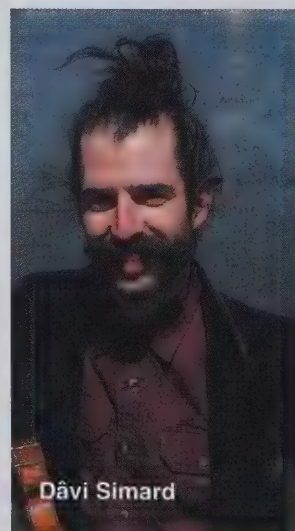
The Folk Singers and the Bureau

The FBI, The Folk Artists and the Suppression of the Communist Party, U.S.A.—1939-1956

By Aaron J. Leonard,
Repeater Books, London, U.K.
ISBN: 9781913462017

The relationship between Communism and folk music in the '40s and '50s is a complicated one. Some denied it existed at all. Some imagined that folk music was a well-oiled Communist plot hatched in the Kremlin by Stalin and his henchmen.

Having been raised in the



Communist left in Toronto, I was always aware that folk music was our music. Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Paul Robeson were our superstars. The fact that the FBI figured this out was never a surprise; it was no secret. Various books, from the raving right to the analytical left—see below—have explored this.

Aaron Leonard looks very specifically at how the FBI's war against the American Communist Party attacked folk artists. He looks at a few high-profile artists and tracks the attempt to bully or silence them, and their responses, from grovelling for forgiveness to standing tall and proud—Pete Seeger.

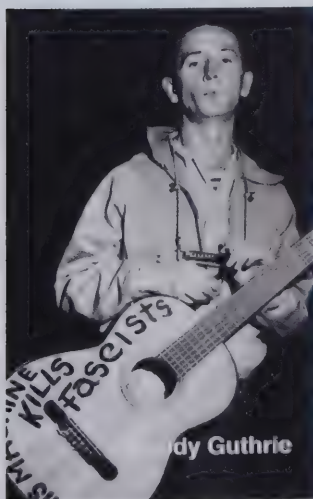
Leonard does it well. The book is immensely readable and tells the tale of a time that might have valuable lessons for today when right-wing vigilantes south of the border are again looking for antifa and Black Lives Matter bogeymen under various beds.

Well worth reading.

By Gary Cristall

Further Reading: Richard Reuss: American Folk Music and Left Wing Politics; R. Serge Denisoff: Great Day Coming—Folk Music and the American Left; David A. Noebel: Rhythm Riots and Revolution.

www.repeaterbooks.com



Rise Again

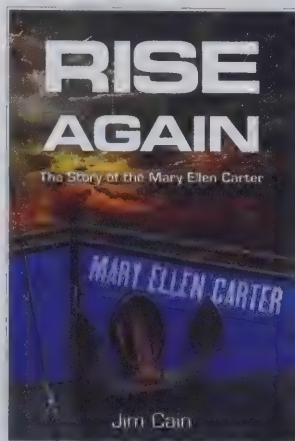
The Story of The Mary Ellen Carter

By Jim Cain

Publisher : Jim Cain

ISBN-10 : 0988204649

ISBN-13 : 978-0988204645



I often draw inspiration from books—I find stories or facts that can be woven into songs.

My characters last for about five minutes. I have never thought of going in the opposite direction and using a song as inspiration for a longer work.

Jim Cain of Rochester, NY, decided to do just that. He's taken Stan Rogers's anthemic *Mary Ellen Carter* and used it as the inspiration for his sprawling novel of the same name. He creates a back story for the story song: why had the skipper been drinking? Why did the mate feel no pain? How did she get so close to Three Mile Rock anyway?

Along the way, we learn about Transport Canada safety regulations, a deep dive into salvage techniques, the finer points of feeding a crew at sea, and more. Cain has meticulously and exhaustively researched the specialties that touch on his subject matter and weaves them into his narrative for an—if you'll forgive the pun—immersive experience.

Dyed-in-the-wool Rogers fans will get a kick out of the way

Cain brings in other songs from Stan's canon. Emmett Pierce, from *Field Behind the Plow*, shows up, as does a touching reference to the equally epic *White Squall*.

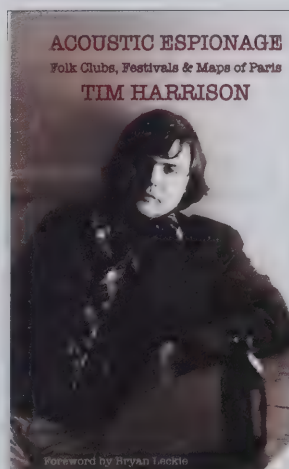
Peppered throughout the text are scannable QR codes, which lead you to videos, articles, illustrations, and websites that flesh out the experience and provide a soundtrack for your reading.

At 500 or so pages, it will keep you occupied for a good chunk of the remainder of the pandemic.

While the amount of background research is impressive, the narrative would be more compelling with judicious dating as sometimes the story suffers from the weight of the details. This isn't a deal breaker but while considering the editing, a larger font size wouldn't go amiss for aging eyes.

The book is currently self-published and is available from www.teamworkandteamplay.com

— By James Keelaghan



Acoustic Espionage

Folk Clubs, Festivals & Maps of Paris

By Tim Harrison

New Press Books

ISBN: 978-1-989797-06-8

Tim Harrison helped found

Summerfolk in Owen Sound in 1976. He was 24 years old at the time and its artistic director. With no experience, he would make up for his lack of know-how in enthusiasm. Later, he held similar positions at the Mariposa Folk Festival, Eaglewood Folk Festival, Northwind Folk Festival, and Big Music Festival on Gabriola Island, BC.

As a singer/songwriter, Harrison has released seven solo albums and one retro-compilation throughout an intriguing and far-travelled career that now spans five decades. *Acoustic Espionage* is a fascinating account of his many adventures working all aspects of the Canadian folk scene from a fan's perspective—meeting Tom Waits after a poorly received set opening for The Good Brothers—to the dilemma of dealing with such neurotic artists as former Monkee Peter Tork.

Harrison's anecdotes are numerous, and engrossing, and, sadly, brief. And that's the problem with *Acoustic Espionage*. At a mere 142 pages, it skips quickly along offering largely frustratingly short insights into a litany of colourful characters, both internationally renowned and relatively obscure. Chronological events take a backseat to his appraisal of these various individuals that range from storied Canadian heavyweight boxer George Chuvalo to pioneering Mariposa artistic director, Estelle Klein. While these singular vignettes are quite wonderful, without being woven fluently into a narrative they end up looking like a shopping list. But there's an honesty and modesty about Harrison's dialogue, highlighted as he details a pompous, posing Murray McLauchlan, then host of the CBC Radio show *Swinging on a Star*. As McLauchlan's "B guest" he introduces Harrison

with several pithy comments. Harrison and his musical colleagues then renamed the show *Swinging at a Star*.

Clearly there's a compelling autobiography in Tim Harrison's stellar and extensive career. But for the want of a writer's discipline or possibly an editor's steady hand, *Acoustic Espionage* will have to suffice as a first draft.

— By Roddy Campbell
www.timharrison.ca

Letters

Dear Roddy,

On behalf of myself and Sue, the gang at Borealis, and I'm sure many, many more musicians and fans of folk music in all its forms, I want to thank you for all the years that you have kept *Penguin Eggs* alive and vital.

The magazine has outlasted several others of its ilk and we

know that was by no means easy.

Penguin Eggs editorials, opinion pieces, and reviews have in many ways become a collective gathering place and billboard for folk music in Canada. It has been the source one goes to to discover new music, artists, and the latest recordings.

And, of course, the opinion pieces have always been fun to read, whether they be thought provoking or a curmudgeonly complaint bemoaning the loss

of tradition.

Penguin Eggs is going to be missed—big time. Perhaps, if we're lucky, someone lurking out there will be inspired to pick up the reins and publish *Penguin Eggs II*. One can only hope.

In the meantime, many thanks to you and Annemarie for bringing us such a great musical read and all the best to you both.

— Bill Garrett, Sue Lothrop,
Linda Turu, Alex Sinclair, Grit Laskin, Judith Laskin

Critiques

Emilyn Stam and John David Williams



Emilyn Stam et John David Williams

Honeywood (Indépendant)

Le violoniste, pianiste et accordéoniste Stam et le clarinettiste

et accordéoniste Williams se sont rencontrés en jouant dans le très éclectique groupe de musique des Balkans/klezmer/tsigane, Lemon Bucket Orchestra. Ensemble, ils ont composé et créé cet ordre de chansons dans la tradition du BalFolk, un événement européen de danse et de musique folk. *Honeywood* est une communauté rurale en Ontario où ils ont organisé leur propre Festival BalFolk pendant des années. L'enregistrement met également en vedette plusieurs amis et complices musicaux à la basse, à l'accordéon, au violon, au banjo et à la mandoline. Il y a toutes sortes de

danses traditionnelles ici : des scottishs, des valse, des mazurkas, et bien d'autres, toutes jouées avec un enthousiasme contagieux donnant envie de danser. Ça s'écoute bien assis, mais pour en profiter au maximum, levez-vous et laissez-vous aller! Cet album est parfait pour un party de danse BalFolk en confinement.

Par Tim Readman

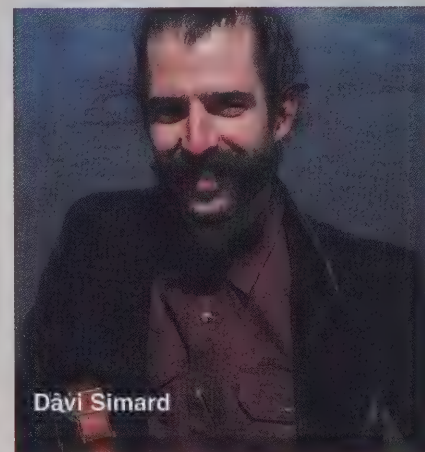


Dâvi Simard

Azwari (MVD Audio)

Le nouvel album de Dâvi Simard, sobriement sous-titré *Violoneux*, était attendu par de nombreux amateurs

de musique traditionnelle québécoise. Connu pour sa fructueuse collaboration avec le Cirque Alfonse, Simard livre ici une quinzaine d'airs et de chansons issus du répertoire traditionnel du Québec et de l'Acadie. Derrière ce sous-titre, *Violoneux*, et le ton sépia de la pochette, on entrevoit la figure maintenant lointaine du porteur



de traditions du XXe siècle, celle des musiciens que l'on remercie aujourd'hui de nous avoir transmis ce répertoire qui abreuve le folklore contemporain. Simard, en s'appropriant cette image, fait du violoneux un multi-instrumentiste, un chanteur de complaintes, un arrangeur et un ingénieur de son. S'entourant de nombreux des musiciens traditionnels les plus établis du Québec, Simard mobilise pour certains airs un ensemble bien garni, et parfois préfère l'intimité d'un duo, livrant notamment une chanson partagée avec la violoneuse Stéphanie Lépine, et « Deux reels d'Anthem » avec David Boulanger. Avec deux airs au violon seul, accompagnés par la seule constance du tapement de pieds, un *Reel du Pendu* et une *Disputeuse* aux versions rares, précises, Dâvi Simard touche à l'essence de la pratique des violoneux qui l'ont inspiré. C'est un album d'une richesse subtile et raffinée.

Par Alexis Chartrand



Emilyn Stam & John David Williams



À la rencontre de Cécilia

C'était une bonne idée de changer de nom. Le trio de musique traditionnelle Cécilia, qui a sorti récemment son premier album *Accent*, s'appelait au départ « Turmel-Leahy-Schreyer ».

Ce petit nom original, énumérant les noms de famille des membres du groupe, était un peu intense à prononcer.

« Nous voulions quelque chose de plus simple, et c'était important pour nous d'avoir un nom bilingue puisque nous habitons tous au Québec », commente l'accordéoniste à boutons Timi Turmel, sacré trois fois champion de l'accordéon au Québec. La nièce d'Erin Leahy a suggéré Cécilia, son deuxième prénom.

Cela avait beaucoup de sens puisque la pianiste Erin Leahy est membre du groupe de musique folk familial Leahy, qui a remporté un Prix Juno et qui a été un fil conducteur pour le trio, qui s'est formé en 2017.

« Je connais Erin et sa famille depuis des années. Quand j'étais jeune, j'étais le rival de son frère, Donnell », se souvient Louis Schreyer, champion de violon canadien lauréat d'une multitude de prix. Schreyer a joué quelques fois avec Erin Leahy, et Turmel en a fait autant. Puis, il a rencontré Turmel lorsqu'ils étaient tous deux enseignants au Leahy Music Camp, une entreprise familiale de longue date à Lakefield, en Ontario, et le trio fut créé.

Ils ont uni leurs forces parce que : « Nous avons vu et saisi cette occasion de créer des arrangements intéressants. Chacun alimentait la créativité de l'autre », selon Schreyer.

Le groupe a commencé à travailler sur *Accent*, un album de reprises entraînantes, en 2018. L'album devait être lancé en avril dernier, mais la pandémie a frappé et la sortie fut reportée, ainsi qu'une poignée d'engagements pour des concerts au printemps et à l'été.

Maintenant que l'album a vu le jour, ses reprises rafraîchissantes, mais respectueuses de la musique traditionnelle, gagneront le cœur des « fans de trad » et en attirera bien d'autres.

Citons un exemple typique : la valse *Hommage à Dorothée*, un hommage pianistique à la musicienne traditionnelle Dorothée Hogan par le compositeur québécois feu Philippe Bruneau, qui avait beaucoup collaboré avec Hogan.

« Dans ma famille, on adorait les valse », explique Leahy. « Je crois qu'il y a une influence classique dans ce cas précis [*Hommage*]. Au lieu de copier le travail de Dorothée, qui était d'ailleurs sublime, j'ai découvert d'autres couleurs, il y a une touche d'influence latine dans certaines parties. »

Schreyer brille sur *Whalley Range*, un pot-pourri de quatre pièces qui commence par la slip jig de Michael McGoldrick, *Farewell to Whalley Range*, qui est l'objet d'un grand nombre d'enregistrements.

« L'ordre d'airs enlevant se termine sur *Lad O'Beirne*, dit Schreyer. Je jouais *Lad O'Beirne* avec Erin et Timi avant même que l'idée de CD ne germe. Nous avons beaucoup de plaisir à jouer cette pièce. »

Turmel prend le devant de la scène pour la dernière pièce, *The High Reel*. L'air défile à la vitesse de la lumière, mais chacune des notes jouées par Turmel est claire et forte.

« C'est la pratique », affirme-t-il. « C'est comme pour tout dans la vie, il faut pratiquer si on veut atteindre ce niveau. »

Le trio a finalement ramené ce genre de morceau sur scène en septembre, lors de La Grande Rencontre, un festival montréalais de musique et de danse traditionnelle.

C'était merveilleux de jouer devant public à nouveau; je me sentais chez moi », se souvient Leahy. « [Jouer devant public] nous rappelle que nous faisons partie d'un écosystème artistique et communautaire plus global, une partie très importante de l'expérience humaine. »

Par Pat Langston

Traduit par Véronique G.-Allard





Bon Débarras

Divers repères artistiques alimentent leurs chansons et danses traditionnelles.

**Par Pat Langston
Traduit par Véronique G. Allard**

Le public restreint de 70 personnes se tenant à distance était suffisant pour que le trio traditionnel québécois Bon Débarras redécouvre les joies de jouer devant public.

Comme tant d'autres d'artistes, les trois Montréalais ont vu leurs plans de tournée détruits par la pandémie. Confiné et incapable de donner des spectacles, « je me sentais comme un lion en cage », dit le multi-instrumentiste et danseur percussif Dominic Desrochers.

Donc quand Bon Débarras s'est finalement réuni en septembre pour un modeste concert devant public au Festival de musique et de danse traditionnelle, La Grande Rencontre de Montréal, il y avait de la gratitude, dit Jean-François Dumas, également multi-instrumentiste. « C'est en perdant le droit de jouer devant public que nous avons réalisé à quel point c'était précieux. »

« La meilleure manière de partager la musique est de cœur à cœur, en ayant des gens devant nous », ajoute la violoniste Véronique Plasse. Les restrictions provinciales liées à la COVID empêchaient les gens de danser, mais « nous avons vu des gens taper du pied et nous avons vu le courant passer dans leur sourire et leur langage corporel. Ce n'est jamais comme ça lorsqu'on regarde un spectacle sur un écran. »

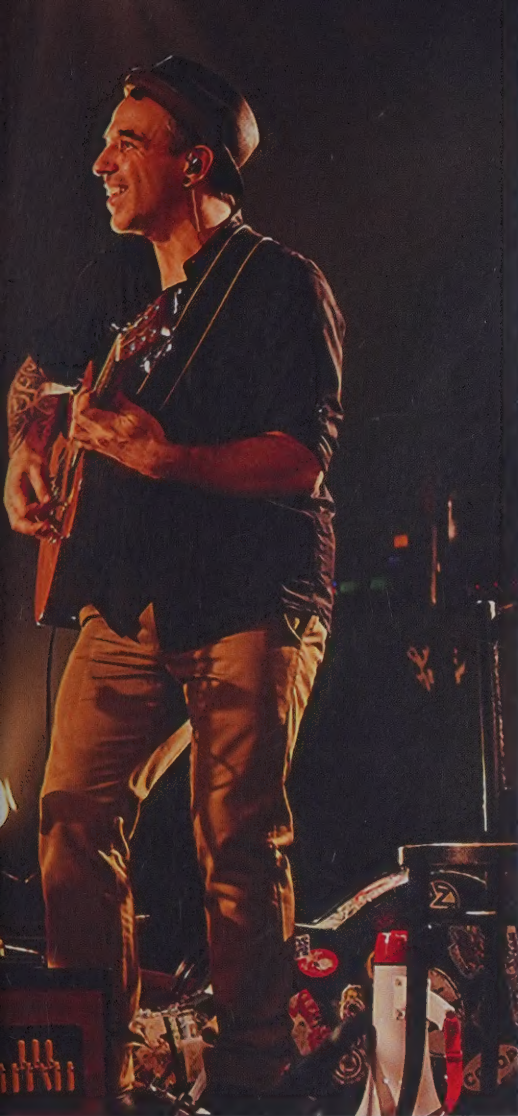
Taper du pied n'est pas vraiment ce que Bon Débarras produit comme effet, puisque sa musique propose plutôt de se débarrasser des émotions négatives, comme le suggère son nom, alors que « débarras » (dans le

sens d'endroit de rangement) fait référence au fait que le trio adore exhumer et réutiliser du vieux matériel artistique. En plus de ses quatre albums, son EP et ses concerts, le trio s'est taillé une niche avec ses soirées dansantes à louer. Il joue de la musique alors que la calleuse Yaëlle Azoulay ordonne la piste de danse.

« La musique est mouvement et le mouvement est musique », dit Desrochers. « La danse de pas, par exemple, est très rythmique, donc la frontière entre le musicien et le danseur est très mince. »

Cette proximité est particulièrement vraie dans la musique traditionnelle, qui est faite pour danser, dit Dumas, donnant comme exemple le flamenco.

La danse et la musique unissent régulièrement leurs forces sur leur dernier album *Repères*. Le titre fait référence aux différents points de repère artistiques ayant influencé la musique du groupe, plongeant ses racines dans la culture francophone non seulement du Québec, mais de toute



l'Amérique du Nord.

Gigue de garage, composée par Desrochers, combine la danse et la musique avec le son d'un jeu de pieds joyeux. « J'étais dans le garage et je voulais créer une nouvelle danse, dit-il. Mais j'étais comme un auteur devant une page blanche. Alors j'ai arrêté de me concentrer sur la danse et j'ai commencé à composer la musique. »

L'éducation fait aussi partie des priorités du groupe. L'École buissonnière est un spectacle musical interactif offert dans les écoles et les festivals pour enfants au Canada et en France. Le cahier pédagogique à lui seul, téléchargeable à bondebarras.ca, vaut le prix du billet tant il regorge d'histoire de la musique et de suggestions d'activités pour les élèves.

L'École buissonnière, un des deux spectacles qu'ils ont présenté au Festival de Montréal à l'automne, occupe une place importante dans le cœur du groupe. Il s'agit de transmettre un héritage, explique Dumas, particulièrement lorsqu'ils jouent dans leur

province natale.

« Cette musique fait partie de notre culture alors nous voulions la partager avec le plus grand nombre possible. Nous aimons que les enfants aient une idée de leur origine. »

Desrochers ajoute que les jeunes grandissent au sein d'une société obsédée par la popularité et la gloire instantanées, et qu'en savoir plus sur leurs racines leur montre le chemin pour y arriver plutôt qu'un résultat instantané. « Se sentir heureux est un mode de vie, une pratique, au même titre que le yoga. C'est ce que représentent la musique et la danse pour nous. »

« Nous espérons que notre sentiment touchera les enfants; il n'est pas seulement question de musique, mais de communauté », lance Dumas.

Et les enfants sont un bon public. Ils peuvent être exigeants, mais ils se donnent à fond et ils adorent contribuer aux FAQ après les spectacles.

« Ils veulent partager leur expérience », remarque Plasse. « Ils vont dire des choses comme : Moi aussi je joue du violon! »

La voix et le violon de Plasse sont à l'honneur dans la pièce Avec un peu d'âme sur le nouvel album. Elle a pris un poème du célèbre Gilles Vigneault et en a fait une valse.

« C'est un poème magnifique sur le courage d'aimer. Il a pris quelque chose de simple et a trouvé les bons mots, dit-elle. Quand je l'ai lu, un rythme et une mélodie me sont venus à l'esprit. »

Nutshimit est aussi un mélange de la musique de Bon Débarras et des mots d'une autre personne, en l'occurrence la poétesse innue Joséphine Bacon. Sorte d'hymne à la

paix des paysages intérieurs, géographiques et ancestraux, la chanson mélange des paroles en français et la poésie de Bacon récitée dans sa langue maternelle, l'innu-aimun.

Dumas a rencontré Bacon, qui habite à Montréal depuis 1970, il y a plusieurs années. Un jour, le groupe l'a invitée à collaborer à une chanson. « Elle est un pont entre les cultures et les nations, et c'est ce que nous voulons être. »

On se met rapidement à comparer les ressemblances et les différences entre les Premières Nations et les Canadiens français. Plasse affirme qu'ils ont tous deux une relation profonde avec la nature, tandis que Dumas souligne la rupture survenue lors de la conquête britannique en 1759 entre les deux groupes qui avaient pourtant l'habitude de coopérer, ainsi que le mélange des cultures au Québec depuis lors.

« Nous partageons l'ADN des Premières Nations en raison des nombreux mariages mixtes. Je vois des ressemblances dans nos danses », ajoute Desrochers, ramenant la conversation vers la musique.

La dernière pièce instrumentale Reel du rêve parle d'un rêve que Dumas a fait après une retraite de méditation de trois jours : Lors d'un rassemblement graduel d'amis musiciens et de membres de la famille autour d'un feu au crépuscule, se fait d'abord entendre le violon, suivi de danses percussives, puis d'une accumulation d'autres instruments, de chants et de variations, culminant en une célébration exubérante de musique, de communauté et de vie.

« C'était un cadeau de ma psyché », sourit Dumas.



A Point Of View



Leonard Podolak

Grammy Award recipient Leonard Podolak presents his aspirations for the Canadian folk music scene.

Being asked to give my opinion about the future of Canadian folk music in this, the very last edition of the unique Canadian folk music magazine—a magazine that has entirely elevated the scene and all of its participants—is a lofty ask. It's a lofty task to try to summarize in a thousand words, and from one person's point of view. Especially mine, which I admit has more than a few biases.

Although I grew up in folk music, and even had/have a few relatively successful bands—but so have a lot of folks—I therefore consider this a huge honour. I won't take throwing around my opinion lightly; I'm gonna toss it out there with all of my might, so you might want to duck!

What do we do after COVID-19? Well, I can say this: I sure as hell hope we don't go back to how it was before. Where we refer to our society as an economy, and our scene as an industry, and how we accept in parallel a certain

amount of exploitation on a world level, and within folk music.

In our quest to elevate the folk music business, I fear we are elevating the business in a disproportionate way relative to the music, and to artists.

Having worked for 25 years as a touring artist, and now for a handful as an artistic administrator and executive director of a non-profit arts organization, I see what goes into it on both sides. I have experienced the ups and downs but when it comes to either playing or promoting folk music in this country, I have witnessed and seen the heart and soul required to make it translate across a broad audience, to keep the team geared up and pointing in the same direction, balancing work with family, when everyone knows this is never 9-to-5, and it's much the same experience.

It's when you're trying to fall asleep; it's when you do get to sleep and dream, or have nightmares, about it; it's when you wake up; when you have your coffee; and so on. And then you get the working hours. In other words, the people in this "business" are all drawing on everything they have to make it happen, because they care about it very deeply, because we all love the music, and what it stands for.

The best of the best in this world live on the edge—they are not comfortable being comfortable. They keep striving to paint a picture of a better world as they see it, and are constantly mixing colours until just the right combination appears that will capture the light.

The point of a folk scene isn't to have a few headliners, it's to have a robust scene where the scene is the headliner. A scene that includes performance opportunities and festivals and fun, but also mentorship, including local communities, passing on traditions and carrying them forward.

Folk music is folk art. It's not trying to get a deal or a Juno—far from it—and curators of folk music should all cancel their subscriptions to *Pollstar*. It's printed in the *Death Star*, and has too many directors trapped in a tractor beam of financial/artistic tunnel vision, forgetting that the framework that holds up the big stages is built on years of cultural practice, political struggle, and community engagement. Eat That, Darth!!!

The Canadian folk festivals were built as a platform for those you DIDN'T hear on the

radio.

In 1974, my father, Mitch Podolak, updated the model at the Winnipeg Folk Festival, the model created by Estell Klein at Mariposa in the early '60s. He embraced and was extremely influenced by Estell's programming, but what made him a pioneer was how he embraced the volunteers, treating them as close as possible as he could to how an artist was treated. If the artists were having steak for dinner, so were 2,000 volunteers! This is the worldview that guided the folk revival, and it's certainly the worldview that grew Canadian folk music. That view is that we take care of one another to the best of our possible ability.

Now, many of us are struggling to survive individually or as organizations. For this reason, we need to embrace the digital shift that has necessarily occurred and to work together. The Internet provides organizations from around the world an opportunity to collaborate on a local, national, or international level. Sharing one another's audiences, building a larger platform for musicians to be discovered. Cross marketing and co-promoting digitally widening brand exposure, to sound corporate for a second.

Artists should do the same, by forming cross-posting groups with other bands, where they all decide they're going to collaborate and communicate with one another's fanbases, expanding engagement all around.

It's one thing to call a group of people all interested in the same thing a community but actual, fully functioning communities include characters who work together, help one another, protect one another, partner together, and generally lift one another up.

So while I applaud the work of every individual who has somehow found themselves implicated in the world of folk music in Canada for a living, in one respect or another, I would like to say that to ensure a bright future we need to look for approaches that build successes with and within our local communities, and the wider folk world. We need to re-examine what that is, maybe beyond music or the stages, and to look back on what built the scene, and re-embrace a view of working together in a profound way to change the world. If we operate with that headspace, imagine what could happen with folk music.

And that is my opinion! Thanks to *Penguin Eggs* magazine for lifting up so many.



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Join us for music, awards and more in April 2021 for our annual celebration honouring the finest in Canadian folk music.

Diffusion en ligne en direct l'édition 2021

En avril 2021, soyez des nôtres pour notre célébration annuelle de musique et de remises de prix soulignant les fleurons de la musique folk canadienne.

Thank you Penguin Eggs

For over 22 years, Penguin Eggs has been an important voice in the Canadian folk music community. We wish Roddy all the best in his retirement and will do our best to play our part in keeping your torch lit and carrying it forward.

The CFMA Board of Directors

Merci au magazine Penguin Eggs

Depuis 22 ans, Penguin Eggs est une voix importante de la communauté folk canadienne. Nous souhaitons à Roddy une très belle retraite et nous ferons de notre mieux pour être de ceux et celles qui continueront de porter le flambeau.

Le conseil d'administration des PMFC

folkawards.ca

prixfolk.ca

FROM THE EAST AND FROM THE WEST BOREALIS



LAURA SMITH **AS LONG AS I'M DREAMING** SONGS FROM A TRUE ARTIST'S LIFE

In 2019 singer-songwriter Laura Smith initiated a recording project that would be an essential showcase of songs from her earlier recordings. Tragically she was diagnosed with inoperable cancer that winter and the project took on an urgency and a wider scope. Undeterred by her illness, Laura booked studio time to record two new songs and garnered the strength to finish recording just a few weeks before her death.

Accompanying the new songs is a live performance from her coffee house days in London, Ontario, an amazing jazz session in Hamilton, demos from Toronto and a number of fan-favourites from earlier recordings. All this in an 18-song package that also features Laura's artwork and poetry. Laura Smith has left us with a body of work that will be treasured for years.

BRADEN GATES **KITCHEN DAYS**

SONGS THAT PAINT HONEST PORTRAITS OF EVERYDAY WORKING MEN & WOMEN

Braden Gates' songs bounce from emotional depth and stark imagery to finding humour in everyday life. On *Kitchen Days* he introduces us to the characters he meets on the streets of Edmonton as well as others while working in a restaurant's kitchen. Like other great songwriters, such as Guy Clark and John Prine, he delivers honest portraits of everyday working men and women.

"Kitchen Days is a good 'un." — Les Siemieniuk



Roddy Campbell:

For all the years, it's been a real pleasure!
Wishing you all the best going forward.

The Borealis gang – Linda, Alex, Grit and Bill

borealis

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